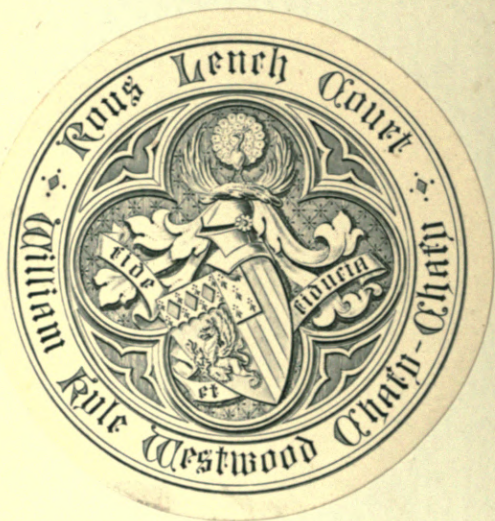


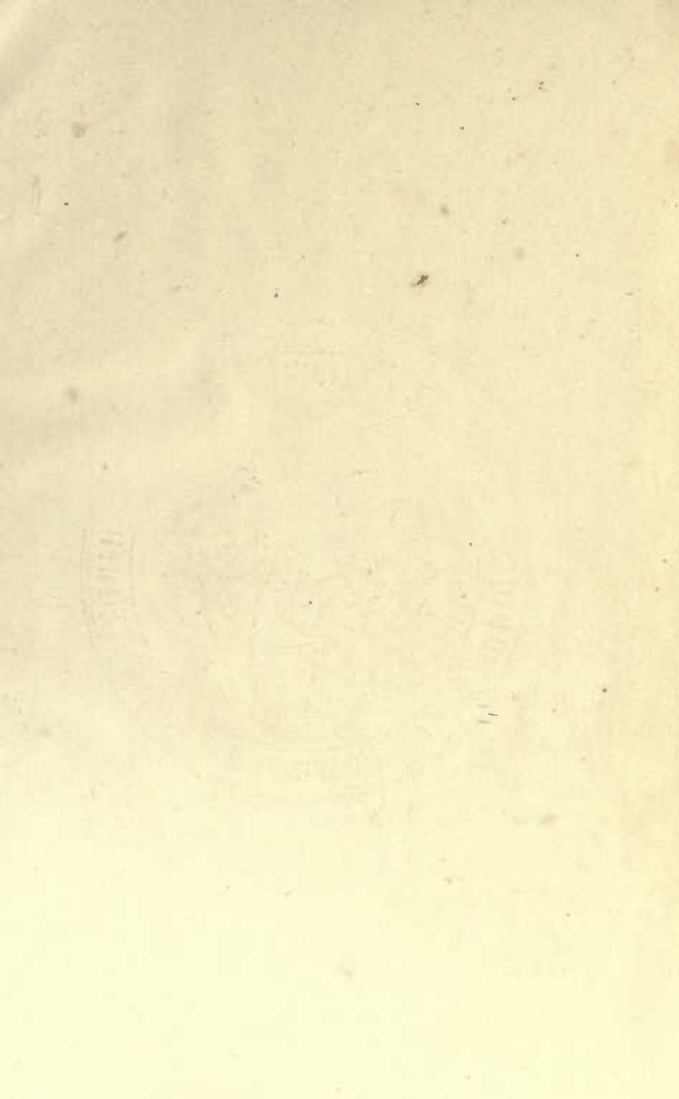
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A SINGER'S STORY.





# A SINGER'S STORY

RELATED BY

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"FLITTERS, TATTERS, AND THE COUNSELLOR."

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL

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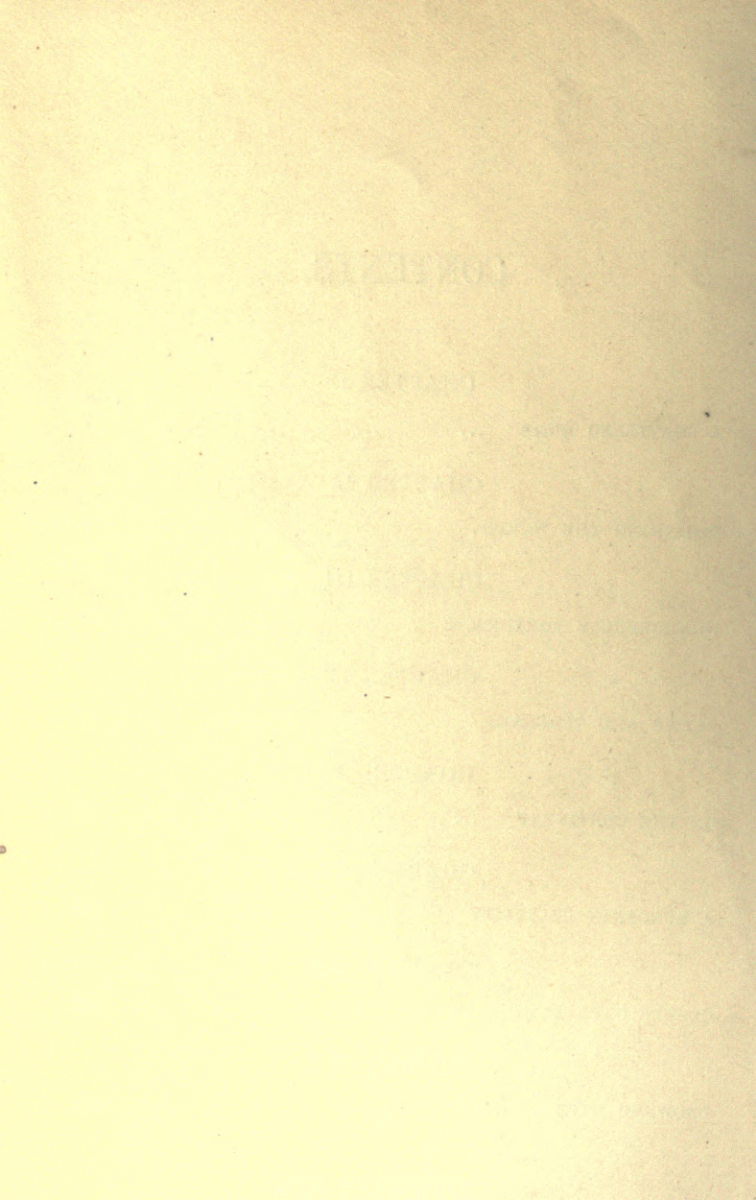
1885

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RICHARD CLAY & SONS,  
BUNGAY,  
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# A SINGER'S STORY.

## CHAPTER I.

### A SHATTERED HOME.

IN one of the large houses of a square in Bayswater, some years ago now, longer indeed than I who tell this story care to reckon, a sad, almost tragic, scene was enacted one gloomy October morning.

An elderly lady, dressed in deep widow's weeds, and a girl of nineteen, who also wore the livery of woe, were the sole inmates of the dining-room. The girl was sobbing painfully in spite of her efforts to overcome herself, and to soothe her companion's grief, the violence of which almost bordered on frenzy.

"Aunt—Aunt Hester, my dear aunt, I beg of you—" She besought in vain, and it was not until long after her own tears had ceased to flow that she succeeded in gaining a mastery over the poor old lady's emotion, and inducing her to listen even to her words of consolation and hope.

Mrs. Vining had indeed cause for grief. Her husband had only been buried that morning, and his confidential

friend and lawyer had deemed it his duty to inform the family of the deceased, which fortunately consisted only of these two ladies, that his departed friend had "left absolutely nothing." He had lived at the rate of two thousand a-year, so it seemed at first difficult, even to a business man like this solicitor, to realize the fact that, from comparative affluence, these poor women should be reduced to almost beggary. But it was so, and the solicitor produced proofs of his assertion. The bank-books were laid before Hester Dalrymple's astonished eyes—one hundred pounds balance. Mr. Vining had no property; he was a business man, and had always been held, and deservedly, to be a man of the strictest probity and respectability. How his affairs came to be in such an extraordinary condition the lawyer professed himself unable to understand. He might have had some heavy call made upon him, which had absorbed his capital; no proof of this existed. His life was not insured. There remained nothing of the comfortable income—everything was gone with him. The lawyer had examined the clerks in Mr. Vining's office in Walworth; they knew nothing—their late employer, a liberal and kindly master, had kept his affairs to himself. The books showed that a *bonâ fide* business had been regularly and honestly carried on. There was no money in the Walworth office, and the two clerks asked to be paid off. As there was no business to be carried on, this request seemed reasonable enough. Mr. Fletcher paid them in full, lifted the books and loose papers

into his hansom, sent the key of the little office to the caretaker, and drove straight to Norfolk Square.

"The sooner I get this wretched business over, the better," he mused, as he knocked at the hall door. "I could not sleep to-night with such a task to face to-morrow. That fine bright girl,—what a pity, what a pity!"

He entered the dining-room, and mustering up all his courage, told poor Mrs. Vining what he had discovered.

She could say not a word; the shock of her husband's death after one day's illness had been more than her feeble nerves could stand, and she gazed blankly at Mr. Fletcher's face.

"Did you know nothing of this before?" questioned Hester Dalrymple, raising her eyes scrutinizingly to the solicitor's face. She had waited an instant to see if her aunt would speak.

"Absolutely nothing. I have known your uncle for thirty years—he was, as you know, a singularly reserved man. I know nothing whatever of his affairs. His will was made twenty-eight years ago, directly after his marriage, and left everything belonging to him to his wife. A very useless document indeed it proves to be."

A long pause ensued, broken only by a long sobbing sigh from Mrs. Vining, and a groan now and again from Hester, who had walked over to the chimney-piece and was leaning her head against it.

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"Well, well, my poor friends!" said the lawyer, "what has happened was God's will; and the secret, if secret there be, will be known in His good time; we can only submit."

There was no secret, Mr. Vining had simply spent every farthing of his income as he earned it.

He thought of his own wife and his children, and he sighed, as much for them as for these much afflicted ones, as he reflected how ill prepared he was to take his leave of them.

"My dear Miss Dalrymple!" he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, "all that remains—I had better speak to you, our poor friend there is unfit for these sad details—all that will remain after the bills are paid, I take it, will be your aunt's little legacy from her relation of one hundred a-year and the contents of this house. You must sell at once and leave. He had no debts, whatever there is will be hers. Say if I shall act for you. My dear, you must take the headship now."

"Yes, thank you. Oh, dear Aunt Hester, do not give way." She ran to her aunt, led, half-lifted her to her chair. The poor lady, who had caught the concluding part of the lawyer's communication, had attempted to rise from it and approach them; Hester's strong arm supported her or she would have fallen.

"I must go," whispered Mr. Fletcher; "I will write to you immediately. God bless you, dear Miss Dalrymple, I can't—I am quite overcome."

He pressed her hand and hastened away. He was really affected, being a sympathetic, kindly man; but the catastrophe moved him for more reasons than one. He had a foolish wife and a large family, chiefly consisting of daughters, who spent far more money than his means warranted. He could not bring himself to apply any check to this state of things. They knew nothing of his affairs. Like his old neighbour Vining, he never spoke of his business at home. The catastrophe in Norfolk Square did indeed affect Mr. Fletcher very unpleasantly; but little by little his thoughts shifted from the Vinings to his own troubles, and by the time the hansom had deposited him in Furnivall's Inn he had in part forgotten them. "So does the dust of the world dry up our tears!"

Hester Dalrymple returned to her post beside her aunt's chair immediately that the door had closed upon Mr. Fletcher. She was a tall slim creature of about nineteen, gracefully built, not to be called pretty,—she was too large, too clever-looking, too powerful in fact for that epithet. Her thick hair was brushed smoothly off the temples of a wide, square forehead, and rolled in a neat soft twist on the back of her head—a head which was only saved from looking too large by its beautifully proportioned shape. Her face was well-shaped also, but her mouth, though handsome, was too large, and her nose was usually called ugly. Ugly it was not, but people said that but for it she might have been a beauty, and this was in a modified sense true. Her

contents. She was passionately fond of music, and her uncle had gratified himself and her by giving her the best teachers London afforded. Suddenly she stopped and laid down the books. She had caught sight of her own full-length figure in the pier-glass at the end of the room; her elegantly-made black crape dress suggested something in connection with the mourning outfit which had been ordered.

"If they are not made up we might stop some of them. Shall I send a note or go?" she debated.

She reflected that she could scarcely with propriety leave the house that day except in a cab; so she determined to write to the head of the mourning department of the house where they dealt, and inform him that she found it necessary to countermand the order given.

She sat down and wrote a note, as clear and decisive as she knew how, then rang for a servant, and desired her to carry it to Messieurs —.

"I shall take a cab, miss, I suppose?" said the servant.

"No, Dempster," answered Hester, "you must walk, and come back as soon as you have delivered the note, because I have something to say to you."

"Yes, miss," answered Dempster, dutifully; but she had gathered something from Miss Dalrymple's manner, and before she left the house on her errand she conveyed her deductions and sentiments to her fellow-servants so unmistakably that, when Hester made her



appearance among them an hour later, all without exception seemed to know what was coming.

They received her announcement as servants do receive such things. They are just like other human beings, and evinced their various emotions in different manners. The cook cried—she had been a long time with them; the house-maid offered to wait for her wages until it should be the young lady's convenience to pay them; the parlour-maid observed that she should require a month's wages in advance, and began to lament the probable non-existence of a personal recommendation; and the kitchen-maid, who was Irish, stared with wide-open eyes and mouth, and put Miss Hester down in her own mind as being 'unnatural entirely' for being so quiet and silent under the circumstances. It was of a piece with the poor gentleman's 'wake,' she thought, which to her mind was "rank haythin, and no good could come of such doings." All these reflections, however, she kept to herself, reserving them for a compatriot's ears—a laundress who lived in the mews, and who used to interpret her dreams, and was her chief friend—and she contented herself with telling Hester that she was sorry for her trouble, which was strictly true, and that she did not mind about her month's money at all, at all, which was not true.

Hester was glad when this was over; but when she was once more upstairs she found a fresh and unexpected piece of business to be encountered. The fore-

woman of the mourning-house had been sent in person to see her regarding the message which the firm had just received from the servant.

"We are sorry to say, miss, that Mrs. Vining's cloak has been cut and fitted, and that we cannot take it back."

"Very well," replied Hester. "Please tell me though, at once, how much of the order you will allow me to countermand. You may as well know the truth as to our affairs. If I had known this day week the state of Mr. Vining's affairs, I would not have incurred any expense for mourning. The servants are all to leave to-morrow, so there will be no mourning for them, and by this day week at the latest there will be a sale in this house."

"Miss Dalrymple, I am—" The forewoman, who had often waited upon Hester and her aunt, was shocked. "Excuse me," she said, "I remember you coming in as a little child, and I am really sorry for such affliction and trouble,—such a nice lady as your aunt was, never gave any trouble that she could help."

"Thank you, Miss Brown, it is very kind of you," said Hester. The dressmaker's sympathy for her aunt touched her.

"Oh yes, indeed," began Miss Brown,—“and indeed I know what trouble is, Miss Dalrymple, I do, I can assure you. Ever since poor father died I have had to keep my mother and an invalid brother, I have, which it is so hard on me. My brother, who is well-to-do in the grocery line, and gives no assistance, he doesn't.”

"Miss Brown," said Hester, suddenly, "you could tell me of cheap respectable lodgings—one bedroom, and one sitting-room, and attendance; we must have this to-morrow; and we have no relatives in London. Do think, I am sure you will be kind enough to—"

Miss Brown did know, and gave her at once an address of a house which was situated in a bye-street about two miles from their present abode.

She undertook to countermand the order for the servants' mourning, and for some silk and crape dresses which fortunately were not yet cut. Hester felt relieved and encouraged, and thanked her cordially for the goodwill which she had unmistakably shown.

Then without a moment's delay she summoned Dempster, the housemaid, who waited on Mrs. Vining, and by dint of unremitting work they succeeded before twelve o'clock that night in packing everything which, in Hester's eyes, it was fit and proper that they should take with them out of the house. Her aunt had long ago retired, and was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion and prostration. Hester determined to leave nothing undone before she sought her own couch. Dempster had gone down to supper at nine—her appetite was punctual despite the unusualness of everything just now—and she related such a glowing tale of Miss Dalrymple's energy and courage that the whole kitchen was moved to admiration. Even the Irish kitchen-maid, who in her heart disapproved the coldness and heartlessness of Saxon practices at such times, caught

the infection, and cried a little over the Saxon beer and cheese, of which she consumed a great deal more than anybody else, disapproving most probably all the time. The cook, a kind old soul, invested her sympathy with solid shape, and improvised some dainty which she sent up on a tray with her duty to her young mistress. Hester eat the food gratefully; she was no more than a growing girl, although the cruel experience of the last twelve hours had made a strong woman of her.

"Go to bed, Dempster," she said, when the last trunk was labelled and strapped down; "I have kept you up too long, I fear."

"You had better go also, miss," observed Dempster. "I wonder at your spirit, I do; but you had best not make yourself ill. Your poor aunt has only you to look to, remember that, Miss Hester."

"Yes," replied Hester, gravely; "and until this morning it was I who looked to her for everything; is it not an extraordinary—a wonderful change?"

"God's ways *are* wonderful," observed Dempster. "I've seen many an up and down, but the like of this here, never! Well, all I can say is, miss, your aunt has much to be thankful for to have a one like you to lean upon. Poor suffering thing! I pity her, I do. I suppose you'll be going out for a governess, miss?"

Hester started; she had had no time to think of herself as yet. Another girl might have repulsed the house-maid's question as an impertinence; Hester's



grave serious mind received it exactly as it was intended—a simple question prompted by friendly interest.

“I must do something, Dempster,” she said; “but I have had no time to think what, exactly. You see we never expected this.”

“No, miss, I know,” returned Dempster. “A governess’s life is not exactly a nice thing, but I knows lots of girls who goes in for it rather than go to service. I mean for nursery governesses. It’s a mistake I think, better be one thing or the other, but not strive for both. When I was under-housemaid at Lord Cornwall’s there was one governess had as much as a hundred and fifty a-year, and I don’t believe as she sang half as well as you do,—not half such a voice she hadn’t. Don’t you be discouraged, miss, you’ll do well yet, any lady might pay you well to have you; and a good religious brought up young person like you, quite the lady always, I say,—you just trust in God, miss, and He will see you through, He will.”

“Yes, Dempster, I do,” replied Hester. “I have ceased to grieve: I have no time to think even of sorrow. Go now. Thank you for your kindness, and good night.”

Dempster withdrew. She felt deep pity in her heart for this bright young creature with all her life before her yet, and the terrible rock, poverty, thrown right across and blocking up its very threshold. What weary bruised feet she would have ere this was surmounted!

“As thy day, so shall thy strength be.” The text

was embroidered in silk above Hester's bed, and her eyes, tired as they were, rested on it with comfort and refreshment. She took her own Bible, a tiny black morocco bound book, and selected for herself the fourteenth chapter of St. John, and read it reverently and lovingly; then she knelt and prayed earnestly for strength to fulfil the task laid upon her, that she might be able to repay to the widow all that was due from herself—a debtor indeed—for eighteen years of motherly care and watchfulness.

Hester Dalrymple knew that she had entered Mrs. Vining's house a penniless orphan baby, the only child of Harcourt Dalrymple, a naval officer, who had died of yellow fever on the Gold Coast, and who had been followed by his wife a month after she had received the news of her bereavement.

William Vining and his wife Hester had been father and mother to Hester Dalrymple ever since.

It was something more than a sense of duty that moved Hester now,—filial love, gratitude, religion, all prompted this pure generous young soul, and armed her for the conflict with the unknown troubles of the yet mysterious and untried world. “*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,*” and with the Divine words upon her lips, Hester fell asleep.

## CHAPTER II.

## BEGINNING THE WORLD.

THE following day saw Hester and Mrs. Vining established in the lodgings selected for them by Miss Brown, the draper's forewoman. They had the merit of being cheap certainly, and it was their sole recommendation. A dead wall faced the solitary window of the horrible little sitting-room, with its hard horsehair-covered chairs, each furnished with an antimacassar. At least half their boxes had to be sent away to be stored, there was not space for them in the confined stuffy bedroom; but the place was clean, and the landlady, who was evidently impressed by the luggage and dress of her new lodgers, attentive and civil.

Hester was too busy to give more than a passing look to her new domicile; she had paid off the servants, and had seen them all depart before she left Norfolk Square. She had had a letter from Mr. Fletcher early in the morning, or rather from his clerk. He named a firm of auctioneers, to whom he advised her to write or send. She had acted upon this without loss of time, and had left the house in charge of people put in by

the auctioneers, who were taking the inventory with a view to advertising the sale. Their presence in the house deprived the departure of half its sting. It was with a feeling of relief that she looked her last upon her old home as the cab turned out of Norfolk Square in the direction of Notting Hill.

There was a week now of waiting before them both. Until the auction should have been held and the accounts given up Hester could determine upon nothing. She knew nothing of the value of the furniture, save that she recollected her uncle to have said that he had spent nearly fifteen hundred pounds upon furniture since he had come to inhabit the house which they had just left. She wondered if the sale would bring in one-third of that sum. It ought to bring at least five hundred pounds. And this same, carefully invested, would produce a substantial addition to her aunt's little annuity.

However, something else was to be done besides dreaming. She resolved to hold council with a competent adviser as to the best means of securing her own livelihood without delay. She had no relations, her mother and Mrs. Vining were the only surviving sisters of a family in Northumberland which had died out or emigrated. Of the Dalrymples she knew nothing. Her father had displeased his people by his marriage. Mr. Vining was a man who had come to London from a remote country village. She only knew vaguely that he had been born in Wilts. He was a dull, reserved



man, who shrank from strangers, and cared to see no one about him but his wife and niece. Mr. Fletcher knew him about as intimately as any one else did. The lawyer used to live in Norfolk Square, and travelled citywards every morning by the same omnibus with Mr. Vining. A kind of feeling bred by use and wont existed between the two men; but neither had ever broken bread in the other's house. Nor was there any intercourse beyond a formal call exchanged at stated times between the two families. Even this had ceased since the migration of the Fletcher family to the South-West district, and there was no one with whom they were now intimate. Hester's society and companionship had been sufficient for the old couple. There was a clergyman attached to the church which they attended, and he had been a tolerably frequent visitor at their house. Hester used to teach a class in his mission school, and had begun lately to sing in the church choir. She determined to go at once and see Mr. Greville and his wife, and to lay her plans for her aunt and herself before them.

Half-an-hour's walking brought her to the clergyman's house. She knew the hour at which to find him, and was ushered at once into a library, where Mr. Greville usually saw his visitors and transacted parish business.

He had attended her uncle on his death-bed, and had paid visits of condolence to the two ladies during the last sad days of their residence in Norfolk Square.

But of the sudden and violent change in their position he knew nothing. He had passed the house, and had observed that it appeared to be untenanted and bore signs of something unusual, but he was wholly unprepared for the statement which Hester in a few words as possible made to him.

"My dear child! My poor, dear child! Can this be possible?" He could do no more than ejaculate these broken words. "I must call Ellen." He rang the bell with a vigorous pull that brought a servant almost instantaneously. "Tell your mistress to come here for a moment, quickly. Extraordinary! And you have actually left the house? What energy, what decision! noble rectitude!" These last words were murmured to himself as he opened the door to admit Mrs. Greville.

"Ellen, this is our friend, Miss Dalrymple, from 304, in Norfolk Square. She has just made known to me a very sad state of affairs."

Mrs. Greville shook hands with Hester and inquired for Mrs. Vining. "I meant to have called on her to-day."

"They have left the house," exclaimed the clergyman. He then referred to the substance of Hester's news.

"My dear child, how extraordinary!" she exclaimed.

"And you have done all this yourself, unaided and alone," added Mr. Greville. "Ellen, is it not remarkable—"

"Undoubtedly," answered his wife, checking him

with a look. She noted the effect of his words on Miss Dalrymple. "The thing is now to see how we can be of service to Miss Dalrymple. It is imperative clearly that she be provided with some means of earning her own living. You must advertise for a place, and Mr. Greville and I will do all that we can to forward your interests. Give this house as your address; have all letters sent here. We both can answer for you in every way."

"What is the best paper to advertise in?"

"The *Times*, I consider, and you must word your advertisement very carefully. Let me see. Edward, allow me to come to your desk." Mrs. Greville seated herself at her husband's table, took a clean sheet of paper, dipped her pen in the ink, and then stopped suddenly. "What can you do? What can you teach?"

"Teach!" echoed Hester. "I never *taught*. I can speak, read, and write French; can read German; English I suppose I can undertake; and then you know I sing and play—"

"Yes; you *can* sing; you have a very fine voice; it ought to be a great help now, but—" the clergyman's wife sighed. "Look, my dear, listen to this—'Wanted by a young lady, a situation as governess; French, German, English, music, singing:'—do you draw?"

"No."

"'Singing,'" repeated Mrs. Greville. "'Address—Miss D., care of the Rev. Ed. Greville.'" Then followed the address.

"How exceedingly kind of you," said Hester, "to give yourself so much trouble for *me*. I came to talk to you rather for my aunt. I want to find a home for her. She has still her annuity, and I am in hopes that this auction may provide a sum sufficient to invest and add to her little income. Then of course I shall send her whatever salary I earn."

"You want to provide her with a comfortable home. She has, you say, one hundred a year clear; does that die with her?"

"Yes; it is a mere annuity left her by some old relation. I cannot remain with her; it would deprive her of all possibility of comfort. What is to be done to provide her with a home? She is old, very delicate and feeble, and requires all the care and comfort possible."

"Don't grieve, my dear girl," said Mrs. Greville, coming forward and taking Hester's hand in hers. "The question of a home for Mrs. Vining is an easily settled one. Our Committee of Ladies will take it in hand. Let me have your address. I will send this advertisement to the agent's office; there is one close to this. No, dear, I insist on doing it, and as soon as an answer comes you shall hear from me at once. It will cost you," she added with genuine delicacy, "five shillings at least, I should imagine, but I do not know the correct rate; and if we do not get an answer within a week we must repeat it. I shall call on your aunt to-morrow at the very latest."

"Thank you, you are exceedingly kind," said Hester; "every one is," she added simply. "I don't feel afraid in the least of our future."

"Is every one kind?" questioned Mrs. Greville, taking the girl's hand in hers and looking searchingly into her frank face. "Don't be—" She stopped; she was about to say too sanguine, but she reflected in time that the rocks ahead would make themselves perceptible enough in good time. "Don't be despondent about things or people. Now, how are you going home? It is dark already, although it is not half-past five."

"I shall walk back. I know the way perfectly. It is the second time in my life that I have been out by myself."

"Poor child," said the clergyman; "you must feel it very—"

"Dull," supplied Hester, quickly. "Well, it would be if I had not so many things to think of."

When the hall-door had closed behind their visitor, Mrs. Greville turned to her husband before quitting his study.

"Edward, who would have imagined that quiet, reserved girl had such strength of will? I can hardly believe that she is the Miss Dalrymple whom we used to see along with old Mrs. Vining."

"It is wonderful! Imagine it!—the old man only buried yesterday; and she has arranged for an auction, left the house, settled herself in lodgings, and is



going out as a governess, all within forty-eight hours!"

"Oh, come, she is not a miracle, Edward dear." Mrs. Greville's tone was a little dry. "The really delightful thing to me about Miss Dalrymple is her directness and simplicity: she has no self-consciousness; there is not a suspicion of posing in it all. The girl has an uncommon share of healthy intelligence, and acts upon it. I was so vexed with you for praising her, or seeming astonished in the least at what she was doing. Dear, you would utterly spoil her."

The Reverend Edward Greville winced ever so slightly, but his wife gave him no opportunity of replying. She hurried away to snatch a moment of quiet before the evening meal, and wrote and despatched two letters, both by hand, to their respective destinations. One contained Hester's advertisement, which appeared in the next day's issue of the *Times*; the other was to a friend of her own. That part of the letter which concerns our heroine ran as follows:

"You were telling me that your cousin, Lady Ross-ton, required a governess for her two big girls. If you will look at the advertising sheet of to-morrow's *Times*, you will find one, dating from this house, which offers, I fancy, all that Lady R. wants. I know the advertiser, and am greatly interested in her. Her singing is superb."

Mrs. Greville's letter had the desired effect, and before she started to call on Mrs. Vining the following

day, the post brought a letter addressed to Miss D., care of the Rev. Edward Greville. It was with a contented smile that Mrs. Greville read on the flap of the envelope the address, 1250, Curzon Street, Mayfair.

Hester's face was lighted up with a pleasant smile when she took the envelope from her friend's hands. She looked at its contents.

"I suppose this is the regular form, is it not?"

She handed the letter to Mrs. Greville. It ran as follows:

"Lady Rosston begs to say with reference to the advertisement in to-day's *Times*, that she will require a governess on the 3rd November. If Miss D. will call on Monday at eleven o'clock, and bring her testimonials, Lady Rosston will be obliged."

"Well," said Mrs. Greville, "as to the testimonials, you have not any, naturally. I know a friend of hers who could introduce you. Hm! let me see: in your place I would trust to myself. Send up your card, and just tell her that you have to make your first essay in governessing. She is a kind-hearted woman: a regular woman of the world though. However—" Mrs. Greville stopped and thought a moment—"come to me on your way down to breakfast on Monday morning. Get into an omnibus, and be with me at ten. Don't be later; I want to talk to you."

Then the subject was dropped, and she began to hold counsel with Mrs. Vining as to the best and most

congenial manner of arranging for a home for the last-named.

Hester was with her punctually on Monday. Mrs. Greville received her in the breakfast-room. Hester's eyes rested upon the handsomely-equipped breakfast-table, and contrasted it with the squalid service of the lodging-house which she had recently quitted.

"I wanted to offer you a little advice, my child. Lady Rosston, I conclude, will take you. At all events let us for the sake of argument, as men say, assume that she will engage you. You must bear in mind that from the day you enter her house you are *dependent*. You must give up your own will, suppress yourself, and instead of looking upon your position in the conventional way, as if it were something degraded and miserable, a martyrdom, consider it what it really is—an honest way of making a living, and a means out of the terrible difficulties in which Providence has placed you. Now when I told you to give up your will, I meant only that you were to follow the rules of the house and the school-room. They have a large establishment. There is one point on which you must assert your will very strongly. Your circumstances are slightly peculiar, you see: you have a very good name, and an interesting appearance. Lady Rosston is very likely to take an interest in you; now, don't let her. Keep her in her place, and keep yourself in yours. Don't be made a nine days' wonder, and pet of for a fine lady's whim. Don't speak of your affairs to any one, and give as little

trouble as you can in the house ; and, above all things, ignore slights and rudeness. You have been accustomed to a—well, a comfortable establishment, and to being waited on ; try to forget that, and don't set the servants against you by making unreasonable demands. It requires much tact to live in other people's houses—indeed, to live with comfort in one's own house for that matter. Governesses have sad lives, but employers might tell tales too, I suspect. Lady Rosston's present governess, who was some tradesman's daughter, is leaving on account of disagreeables with the household. She rang for hot water twelve times in one day. The housekeeper got tired of the servants' complaints, and went to her ladyship about it. I don't fancy you will make any mistakes, Miss Dalrymple ; but you are young and inexperienced, and I should like to save you trouble if possible."

Hester, who had listened closely, thanked her by a glance, and inclined her head.

"Tell me," continued Mrs. Greville, "are you—was not your father a Dalrymple of ——shire?"

"I do not know," was Hester's prompt reply, in a tone which left little doubt on her interlocutor's mind that her lecture had already borne fruit. She could hardly repress a smile, for the incident had its humorous side.

"Now, my dear, you have twenty minutes to walk to Curzon Street. Down Park Lane is the best way. You are very beautifully dressed."

"I put on my best things,—was that right? These were all ordered, unhappily, before we knew anything; but I got them to take back several things, and all the servants' mourning."

"Very sensible indeed—very thoughtful," said Mrs. Greville, musingly. "Could you come in for a second on your way back, and tell me how you got on at the interview? I am anxious about you, dear."

"Yes, of course. I was about to ask if I might. You are so good to me, Mrs. Greville."

When she reached the great house in Curzon Street which bore the figures 1250, Hester's heart fluttered a little. It was on the dark side of the street, which wore a wintry aspect, for it was a foggy morning. The windows were all without flowers, and there were no gay awnings to relieve the monotonous dull colour of the house-fronts. The door was opened by a tall footman in morning dress.

"Lady Rosston at home?" asked Hester.

He signified yes, and she entered.

"What name shall I say?" questioned the footman. His manner was civil and deferential. The stranger was distinguished-looking and richly-dressed, and servants like dogs regulate their conduct at these junctures by externals.

Hester reflected rapidly that this was a happy beginning, and that she could have nothing to complain of. Handing him her card she said:

"I have an appointment."



The man's manner changed at once. They were at the foot of the staircase.

"Wait there," he said, almost ordered, abruptly, "where you are," and passed rapidly up-stairs. He redescended immediately and threw open a door leading off the hall. "My lady will be down directly."

Hester walked in and seated herself. A great fire was burning with a clear lustre in the fireplace: the dining-room, no doubt. The walls were hung with pictures, which her trained eyes recognized as beautiful. The furniture was old black oak, very beautifully and richly carved; and this the walls, which were painted a kind of ivory yellow, showed off in clear relief. A beautiful little dog was stretched on the rug. He inspected Hester with an indifferent air, then laid down his silky head once more. Hester was watching the little creature half-abstractedly, when he jumped up suddenly, ears and tail cocked. He had heard his mistress's step outside the door.

The next instant Lady Rosston entered.

"Miss Dalrymple?" she said. She had beautiful teeth, and smiled a trifle too persistently. She seated herself with her back to the light, Hester facing it.

"Yes; I am Miss Dalrymple," responded Hester.

Her nervousness had passed off, and she was calmly examining her interlocutor. Lady Rosston's shoulders were very square, and her waist disproportionately small; her elbows were squared, and the plump white hands, which played with a gold eye-glass, were loaded

with magnificent rings. She had a great deal of manner, and was evidently accustomed to a great deal of attention, which it was impossible to withhold and very wearisome to sustain, for her smiles, gestures, and motions were far more exhausting than even what is ordinarily called "most brilliant" conversation.

"Have you ever been out before?"

"Out?" repeated Hester, interrogating.

"I mean, have you taught?—have you ever been in a situation before?"

"No; it is my first experience, and I have no testimonials."

"You can be well recommended?—have references? Well, the fact is, I want a governess to prepare my daughters for masters—rehearse their lessons. Singing—can you sing?"

"Yes; I have been taught by Leporelli."

"Oh! We had him for my eldest daughter, but we have changed to Scugnarelli. I don't approve of his method—do you?"

"I cannot pretend to judge; I had only finishing lessons from him."

"Well, as you are a beginner, Miss Dalrymple, you cannot expect to get the same salary as an experienced governess. Forty pounds a-year, we shall say, and your laundry. I used to allow so much per month for laundry, but ever since I had a German governess I gave it up, her economy was quite too much. *Parlez vous bien Français?—l'avez-vous appris à Paris?*"

Hester was shocked: Lady Rosston's accent was Britannic in the extreme. She answered gravely:

*"Passablement bien, madame; j'ai eu une institutrice française."*

*"Parisien?—Parisiennne, I mean,"* replied her ladyship, more than satisfied, but doubting, or wishing to seem to doubt.

*"Non, Tourangeoise."*

"Do you speak German as well as French?"

"I don't speak German, I can read it."

"That is quite sufficient for my wants. We have masters, while we are in town, for my daughters; when in the country you will have to take entire charge. My eldest, Grizel, has a superb voice. We intend giving her six months in Paris with Razzio before she comes out. They are pretty well advanced as it is; in fact, I am much more *exigeante* as to manners, and that sort of thing, than acquirements. Are you a Churchwoman?"

"Yes."

This question was superfluous, seeing that her advertisement was addressed from a rector's house. Then there was a pause, which Lady Rosston spent running her eye critically over Miss Dalrymple's dress, and Hester in consulting her watch.

"Are you satisfied to give us a trial?" asked Lady Rosston at last, with rather a kinder tone.

"Oh yes, certainly," responded Hester, prompt to recognize the feeling evinced in Lady Rosston's words;

"I consider myself very fortunate to have succeeded so quickly. It is absolutely necessary for me to find a place at once. I shall do my best—give my whole attention to my work, and endeavour to satisfy you."

She sighed deeply. Lady Rosston heard the sigh, and felt a little sorry for a moment or two. She partly knew Miss Dalrymple's circumstances. Her friend Miss Boldene, the same to whom Mrs. Greville had written, had given her a general sketch of them; but, on the other hand, she was under the necessity of retrenching. Her boy at Oxford was in a most expensive set, and Grizel was to be presented a year hence. Then Miss Dalrymple was a beginner, and consequently had an apprenticeship to serve; and, moreover, it was something to be admitted into such a distinguished family at the very beginning. Forty pounds a-year was something out of the fire, reflected Lady Rosston; and this new governess, who was young, would have a very good chance of self-improvement with the "best" masters, in whose hands her daughters' education was; the fact being that the finishing-masters, whose fees were so high, did very little save put the stamp of their distinguished approbation on the preparing governess's work. All the drudgery of coaching was to be Hester's, just as it had been Miss Bonesmith's; all the credit was to be Scugnarelli's, Maldetta's, and Co.

"When can you come to us?"

"As soon as you like. I have some business matters

to arrange;" she remembered that she had also the task of settling her aunt in some kind of home, and added these words hesitatingly.

"Yes, yes, of course," replied Lady Rosston. "I don't want to hurry you, but I am very anxious to—well, the fact is, I detest people to go away, it is so very unpleasant an atmosphere. Miss Bonesmith has been with us for two years, and I rather feel it, and the dear girls too. By the bye, Miss Dalrymple, I hope you wait—I mean, that you will be as sparing as possible of trouble to the servants. Really, they have very hard lives; and I always endeavour to be as considerate as possible to them. In a house like this it is absolutely necessary. *You* will understand that, I am sure."

This last part of Lady Rosston's speech was permeated with an ineffable condescension. She knew that Miss Dalrymple had been brought up in a good house, had been "very well off in that class of society," and this was a complimentary allusion to the fact.

Hester bowed her head gravely.

"I hope you will have no trouble with me." She was anything but obtuse, and scented patronizing inquisitions at once.

"I used to know Dalrymples," observed Lady Rosston.

"Yes," assented Hester. There was the least trace of a smile in the "yes": she was thinking of the forty pounds a-year.

"They were," pursued her ladyship, "Dumbartonshire people."



"Ah!"—this interjection was as dry as a barley-husk.

"This is not a fool," thought Lady Rosston to herself. She was intensely amused by the force of character which the new governess showed; Miss Bonesmith had an uncle, a colonel, whom she had trotted out before she had been five minutes in the house, when she was making her agreement. The more she looked at the new governess the more she liked her. She was decidedly good-looking, and Lady Rosston had a handsome woman's prejudice in favour of good looks. Honest-looking, and well-bred,—a lady in short. It is quite a chance. She summed up.

"You will drop me a line as soon as you can decide to come to us; we leave town on the first of December for Pau. We are going to our villa there to spend Christmas, and probably January and part of February. I shall hear from you then. Good day."

"Forty pounds a-year, only," murmured Hester, "and to have to go abroad directly; poor Aunt Hester, how hard this will be for her! Dare I refuse the chance and trust to Providence to get me a better? How am I to get everything settled; a home—"

She was in Park Lane now. The fog had cleared off, and the sun was shining brightly; the trees, bare already, showed the crowd of horse-riders making their way to the Row; smartly-dressed people on foot walked along, their heads turned towards the equestrians; the black sparrows chirped and twittered in and about the

railings; some horse-guards passed downwards towards the corner, their scarlet coats and fine shining helmets, with their tossing plumes, glowed and glistened in the sunlight; yellow omnibuses crowded with people rumbled along the wood pavement. The bright, various-fronted houses of Park Lane, with their creamy yellow walls and green jalousies, looked interesting and foreign after the gloom of Curzon Street and the dull sameness of the Bayswater district, the very embodiment of monotony.

Little by little Hester's spirits rose again; a current of fresh air crossed the Park, and cooled her cheeks, which had flushed in the stove-like heat of Lady Rosston's dining-room. The wide clear outlook, the crowd, its movement and life, all influenced her. She had her share in the world—her part in life, a duty, a place, and a useful and honourable one; and she began to walk faster, to breathe more quickly, and held herself up straighter with a feeling of proud self-importance.

Years afterwards Hester remembered this morning, and many a sad smile moved her lips as she called to mind her own self-confidence. She scarcely felt the ground under her feet, until she found herself again at the Grevilles' house.

"Well! I know you have been successful: I was watching you as you came up the street just now. Sit down, my dear, and tell me all about it."

Mrs. Greville indicated an easy-chair opposite her own work-table.

Hester seated herself, and put back her crape veil.

"Successful," she repeated; "I hardly know. She was pleasant—rather—but—" she sighed.

"What salary is she giving you?" asked Mrs. Greville quickly.

"Forty pounds a-year," said Hester gravely.

"Oh, fie! oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Greville; she rose from her seat and walked to the other end of the room where the *Times* was lying; "and I quite forgot to say anything to you about salary. Miss Bonesmith, her present governess, has double that. Here is your advertisement." She read the little paragraph over once or twice to herself. There was silence for a minute.

"After all, Miss Dalrymple, you are a beginner, and have no experience in teaching, and you might fall into worse hands than Lady Rosston's. Besides, you must bear this in mind, that if you spend one year or so with her, it will be easy for you to get a good situation and a higher salary. They are people of title and high position, that counts for something; for a great deal in fact. Just look upon this as a sort of apprenticeship to your profession; you will not require to spend your salary, such as it is. I confess I am disappointed."

Mrs. Greville was disappointed and angry as well; she had informed her friend Miss Boldene in the completest manner of Miss Dalrymple's circumstances, hoping sincerely to gain her interest and suffrage in Hester's behalf with Lady Rosston. Miss Boldene, who was an intimate friend and very remote connection of

the last-named, was a single lady of limited means, and in great part a dependent on the Rosstons and a few other families of like position, and she had very little idea of being liberal to any outsider out of the purse whose overflowings she considered her own due. Lady Rosston had been informed of just so much of Hester's circumstances as suited Miss Boldene's views, and had been directly recommended to give no more than forty pounds a-year by that astute lady, who pointed out the inexperience and youth of the tyro, and the advantages to accrue to her.

Mrs. Greville did not know all this. Miss Boldene posed to her just as cleverly as she did to her noble kinswoman, but in a different way. She was a "camp-follower" of society, a parasite of the purest breed.

"I confess I am—a little," responded Hester; "but you advise me, then, to take this situation. Would it be any use waiting a little and trying for a better,—eh?"

"Certainly not," was the decisive reply. "You have been wonderfully fortunate to get an answer so soon. You might advertise for a month without getting a suitable offer. Recollect also that you are at no expense: you have no agent's fees to pay."

"I suppose that is a consideration. Well, I shall certainly take your advice and accept this place. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you: if every one whom I meet is only half so kind and good as you, my troubles will be slight and few."

"Hem!" coughed Mrs. Greville dubiously. "Miss

Dalrymple, I am but too glad to help you; to smooth the way for you a little; and, to tell you the candid truth, I question, after all, if I am doing you a service; if it would not be better to leave you to yourself. There is nothing so common in this world as for people to show a kind of evanescent sympathy with, and kindness for, one like you, a young creature starting out in life. You remember Christian in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' when he set out on his journey, Mr. Pliable accompanied him a short way: well, so it is with us; human nature bids us go, but the—I don't know what, worldly interests, our own affairs, alas! forbid and call us back; my dear, there is but one Abiding Companion.

"Trust none other," resumed Mrs. Greville, after a pause. "Expect nothing: expect *nothing*," she repeated emphatically. "These Rosstons owe you nothing but your salary, board, and lodgings: your time, energy, attention is bought by them: see that you are faithful to your trust. You will be all that; be strong and self-reliant, and take all the advantages there are to be had. You have been told, what she said is much the same thing, that the masters whom they employ will be a source of profit to you; make them so; improve yourself. I am advising you, Miss Dalrymple, as though you were a daughter of my own."

Hester's eyes were full of tears. She rose and took Mrs. Greville's hand in hers. "I cannot accompany you much farther on the road than did Pliable. I am, as you



know, a busy woman. Now, as regards your aunt, you want to settle her in some home or other. The Committee of Ladies will be able to settle that. I believe that a suitable person has already been found, and we will communicate with you at once."

"And yet you tell me to expect nothing!" broke from Hester's lips. "Could any one show more kindness and helpful sympathy than you have done?"

"I have done nothing; nothing but my duty," answered Mrs. Greville, stiffly and constrainedly, as she held out her hand to say good-bye to her visitor, who had stood up to go: but when her eyes met those of Hester's, shining with tears, she obeyed an impulse that came straight from her heart, and she clasped her arms about the girl's shoulders and kissed her with goodwill.

## CHAPTER III.

## WONDERFULLY FORTUNATE.

TEN days later saw Hester Dalrymple installed in Curzon Street. Her aunt had been placed in a home kept by a reduced gentlewoman, which was under the charge and supervision of Mrs. Greville's Parish Committee, and where three other ladies somewhat similarly circumstanced lived. It was a small house, plainly and comfortably furnished, and Hester felt that her aunt might be at least contented there. Eighty pounds a-year taken from Mrs. Vining's little annuity was to be paid for her maintenance, and Hester hoped to be able to provide some little comforts and luxuries in addition out of her own earnings. The auctioneer's accounts had been a terrible blow to her; instead of the five hundred pounds which she had hoped to receive, the auction realized only two hundred. Her piano, a costly grand, bought only two years ago, had gone with the rest. She wrote to Mr. Fletcher, telling him of the result of the sale. Two or three days passed before he acknowledged her note, and to Hester's astonishment, he seemed to take it as a matter of course. He had

told her the day of the funeral that his wife would call to see them ; he fully intended this, and so, to do her justice, did Mrs. Fletcher ; but day by day went by, and she could not carry out her intention, which was in truth but an impulse, and which waned and faded entirely from her mind as time elapsed.

Fortunately for Hester, she had not many bills to pay, and one hundred and forty pounds remained when everything was settled : this she lodged in the bank in her own name, resolving to keep it intact as a resource in case of sickness or some dire need. Her aunt meekly accepted everything. Hester thought, spoke, and acted for her ; she had been completely under her husband's domination during his lifetime, and now it came naturally enough to her to accept Hester's headship.

Hester had saved a few odds and ends out of the wreck of the home in Norfolk Square. One or two familiar pictures from her aunt's room, a screen which she had herself embroidered, a few cushions and an easy-chair, and she unpacked and disposed these in the room allotted to Mrs. Vining ; the reading easel, with its lamp, and the great quarto Bible, that had always been beside her uncle's chair, was placed near the fire—a poor pinched grate, a true "widow's fire," Hester thought as she looked at it. She gave the servant a half-sovereign, and promised her another : she was to keep the coal-box well replenished. She could do no more. Mrs. Vining seemed resigned and contented—apathetic perhaps : she was pleased at the prospect of the company of the

other inmates of the house, broken-down wayfarers like herself. Certainly Hester felt the parting more than she did; she was astonished at the old lady's calmness, and at the evident interest which she took in her new surroundings. It was something further to be thankful for, and Hester made up her mind as the cab conveyed her and her luggage to Curzon Street, that of all the providential circumstances which had attended her of late, this last was matter of most rejoicing.

It was dark when she arrived at Lady Rosston's. There were several carriages standing near the door, and as some people were coming down the steps to get into one of them, Hester's cab was obliged to draw up some distance off. The footman, who had also let her in on the occasion of her previous visit, recognized her and came forwards.

"Your luggage will go round," he said to her. "Drive down the mews entrance," he ordered the cabman.

Hester entered the hall; another footman rang a bell, and then resumed his pose of elegant ease before the fire which was blazing in the grate. A maid showed herself at the top of the stairs in the far recesses of the hall. The footman beckoned to her and indicated the new arrival with a jerk of his powdered head.

"This way, if you please," said the maid, coming forward quickly and scanning Hester from head to foot. She led the way up-stairs, tripping along very fast. When

they got to the first lobby, a large white and gold door opened, and a rush of brilliant pianoforte music and voices came out. Two ladies of magnificent presence appeared, followed closely by a third whose bearing was indifferent. The white and gold door closed noiselessly, and a very rich full-bodied voice sounded resonantly:

"I can drop you *at the corner* of Delahaye Terrace, Miss Boldene, if that is your direction."

"Thank you, *dear* Lady Delforest! thank you so much," replied the third lady effusively and cringingly. All the time that she was answering, her eye was fixed on the tall black figure that was going up-stairs behind the school-room maid. This very cursory glimpse was sufficient to satisfy her of its identity with the new governess who was to pose in the Rosston household as a *protégée* and a nominee of her own, and in whom Miss Boldene already felt a kindly interest, based on the fact that she had furnished Miss Boldene with an opportunity of saving forty pounds a-year to Lady Rosston, her patroness and kinswoman.

"The *corner* will," continued Miss Boldene's subservient voice, "do quite well. Granville Flether is going to recite at Sir Guy Brown's; and I *promised* the poor fellow to go."

"Wich a deal of good you'll do 'im, you will," commented the footman Charles to the footman Henry, as he closed the door behind the ladies. "I 'ate that old Boldene, I do."

"Right you are," assented the chimney decoration.



"Reglar old sponge, a droppin' in to lunch, an' a droppin' in to tea: I 'ates 'er too."

"This is your room, miss," the schoolroom-maid Mackenzie was saying to Hester. "I shall light the gas, and your luggage will be carried up presently. Should you require hot water?"—"het watter," Mackenzie, who was Scotch, called the proffered commodity. She came from the Rosston property, and having heard the new governess spoken of as Miss Dalrymple, made up her mind that she was Scotch, and consequently that she would be nice to her.

The gas was presently turned up, one flaring jet beside the dressing-table. Mackenzie brought in a can of hot water and retired; and Hester having nothing to do until such time as it would suit the luxuriance of the back-stairs' gentry to let her have her trunks, sat down and looked about her new domicile.

At the first glance the room recalled that of Dempster the housemaid in Norfolk Square. The carpet was a great deal more worn, and there was a tiny book-shelf above the old mahogany drawers—that was all the difference. A map, yellow with age and much devastated by flies, hung over the chimney-piece, on which were some queer ornaments, odd vases, the *disjecta membra* of the better rooms; an Oriental inkstand with a porcupine quill handle, the sole trace of Miss Bonesmith that remained behind, save a tolerably well-marked valley in the plain of the bed. There was a comfortable chair and a table, on which last Hester

thought she could dispose some odds and ends of personal property which she had brought from home. The curtains were thick damask, well worn to a neutral tint, like that of the floor covering. A fresh, clean, sprawling-patterned paper covered the walls. Some faded photographs of country houses in Oxford frames hung on these. All was orderly, clean, and desolate of feeling; and Hester felt little by little the chill unwonted impression of strangeness and isolation invading and taking hold of her whole being. She thought of her aunt making friends with her co-inmates of Miss Rivers' household; they were companions by right of misfortune and trouble; but in this great rich luxurious household what friendship dare she hope to find?—what share or part in it could the governess have? Hester abandoned herself to these new impressions, uncomfortable as they were. The white heat of excitement and exertion was over. The edge of the novelty had worn off.

“Only three weeks this day since poor Uncle Charles was buried. A week, little more than a week before that, and how peaceful and undisturbed our lives had been.” And Hester recollected them not without some feeling approaching to remorse. How dull and uneventful she had considered her life at home since her eighteenth birthday, when her aunt had decided that it was time for her lessons to cease! Her lessons had ceased accordingly, and she had found herself like other girls of her class in life with a great deal of unemployed

time on her hands; and, like the majority of her compeers, lacking a motive for effort of any sort. Hester's education was like that of the great mass of English middle-class girls of all degrees of wealth, based as accurately as possible upon that of the highest class in the land. The Duchess of Upton's daughters left the school-room at eighteen, curtseyed to royalty, and at once proceeded to dance for their living, with the goodwill and aid of all concerned. Hester accordingly gave up lessons at the same age, and having absorbed a diluted and colourless curriculum, a sort of mimicry of the elaborate syllabus of the Upton House schoolroom, sat down with tens of thousands of other Hesters to wait on life. She knew, having been taught, how to curtsey to royalty, but she would never have the chance. She could dance for her living like the rest of them, but no partners were forthcoming, no opportunities came in her way. She had no outlet of any kind for her energies intellectual or corporal. She sang in the choir, where her splendid though untrained contralto voice was of very great service, and she taught in the Sunday-school. The orderly methodical service of the Vining household required no amateur assistance from her. They had no society whatsoever. Mr. Vining, like many other men in his position, was anxious for peace and quiet when he returned from the city. Her aunt Hester, a chatty sociable being by nature, accommodated her wishes to his, or rather sacrificed them, and neither of the old people ever took cognizance of the fact that

Hester was no longer a child, but a well-grown young woman. That any living woman old or young could want anything more than good clothes, regular meals, pocket-money, or a hired carriage to drive out in on fine days—this last by way of acme of luxury—never entered Mr. Vining's head ; but Hester sometimes envied the flower-girls in the streets as she drove along with her aunt and the over-fed lap-dog. They did not live by clock-work, as she did. She wished that she knew some girls. Her schoolfellows all lived in remote parts of the country, or at the other end of London, which, as far as intercourse went, amounted to the same thing. She saw plenty riding down to the Park with their grooms following behind them, or attended by gentlemen. Every morning she heard them chattering and laughing together, and their lives seemed very desirable. She knew nothing of the world. She read no novels ; and the world—some of it at least—is to be learned from novels. She had serious books to read ; and she read an immensity of poetry.

She was dull as dull could be, and perhaps in a way it was as well for Hester that this phase of life came to an end. She did not think so now, as she sat in the cheerless room allotted to her, and she bent her head with shame at her discontent and ingratitude for the benefits she had been unworthy to possess and enjoy, and told herself that whatever trouble and unhappiness might come upon her now was a just retribution.

"I look back with regret," she said to herself:

"dare I look forward?—dare I hope that a month hence will find me here, better off—more contented than to-day?" A chill passed over her of apprehension and nervousness. One of the windows was open, and through it came the vague ceaseless roar of great busy heartless London, striking upon her ear almost as a menace; the tramp of horses sounded from the street below with sharper distinctness. The rattle of steps let down, the shutting of carriage-doors, a remote echo of a street organ came in on the air from some side street. She went to the window and closed it; far off down the street was a light in a top window like her own. Hester looked at it with interest for a second.

"I wonder," she said to herself, "is that the window of some poor governess, sitting up there out of the world, and lonely like me?"

Rap, rap, rap, and with no uncertain touch, sounded on the door.

"Come in!" cried Hester, thinking to herself that it was the trunks arriving at last from the nether regions.

"May I come in?" repeated a voice that was not unknown. She opened the door speedily, to find there Lady Rosston herself in person, looking very magnificent in blue velvet, with antique dull-coloured lace setting off her fine pearl-powdered neck and white jewel-decked hands; a tuft of rich-looking white blossoms, tuberoses or some such heavily-scented things, was fastened on her chest, and made itself apparent in more ways than one.



"How do you do?—so glad you have arrived early. I wanted to see you before I go out this evening, Miss er—er——" "Dalrymple," supplied Hester. Her ladyship had not forgotten it, but wished to seem to have; she recollected quite well, for it was something so unusual for her to be snubbed, and she had been on the point that day of almost claiming acquaintance with people named Dalrymple; Hester's reception of this condescension was quite fresh in her mind.

"You are unpacking, I suppose?" pursued her ladyship.

"No," said Hester; "my trunks have not come up. I am quite ready to do anything you wish."

"Well, let us come into the school-room, and I will present to you your pupils." Lady Rosston turned and led the way, her rich dress making an agreeable massive kind of *frou-frou* as she walked; Hester, a tall, slim, jet-black shadow gliding close at her side. Two doors off was the school-room: a green baize door was opened first, and then the door of the sanctum itself—a large square room with two windows, furnished comfortably. A piano and pianette attracted Hester's eyes; under the first-named was a globe; a good-sized mahogany book-case was at one end; each window had a rather pretty writing-table with plenty of drawers; glasses of flowers and flowering plants made the room pretty. A Persian cat with a fluffy tribe of young ones about her turned her amber eyes upon the new-comers over the edge of the quilted basket.

"Helen ! Grizel !" half-called, half-sang Lady Rosston.  
"Come quick !"

An inner door opened, and a tall girl came out. Almost simultaneously another rose from the floor apparently, but in reality from a baize-covered reclining board.

"Now," said her ladyship, "Miss Dalrymple, these are your two young charges. My eldest—Grizel :—dear—I must go to dress. Helen, you will have tea up directly, won't you ? Now, show Miss Dalrymple everything, and give her the school-room book of rules. Miss Dalrymple, the rule-book will tell you everything ; your time is all mapped out : it is so much easier and pleasanter to have things—er—formulated for you."

"Yes, indeed," assented Hester cordially. She felt a little shy under the eyes of mother and daughters. They were tall, well grown, but as yet undeveloped girls, light-haired and light-eyed, with great self-possession and decision of manner. Grizel was good-looking, or rather promised to be. Her blonde hair was cut in a thick smooth fringe, and plaited into a loose club-knot on the back of her neck. She had white teeth, which were rather long and slightly prominent. Helen was as like her as a plain sister can be like a pretty one. Her teeth were larger and more prominent ; the long plait of hair that hung down her back was paler in colour and more coarse in texture ; her eyes were brighter, and she had a quick intelligent look. She was overgrown for her age, and weakly, and spent a considerable portion of her time

lying on a reclining board. Both had fine complexions, but were rather pale.

"Sit down," said Lady Rosston, "you look tired. Shall I send you a glass of wine?"

"I thank you, I never touch wine; I am a little tired, I think," replied Hester.

"A—oh—a total abstainer," commented her ladyship with great approbation. "Well, you will take tea here, you know. You dine at two with us; and—er—the rule-book will acquaint you with all our little regulations. And then you will like to have your evening for unpacking; Mackenzie will assist you. Now, girls, I really must go, you know. It is the first night of Mr. Suffington's play, and dinner will be early. Good night. Helen, to bed at half-past nine, not an instant later. Miss Dalrymple, I am very particular as to punctuality. Good night, good night."

She vanished, gracefully agitating her diamonded hand as she passed through the door, and uttering the words "good night" in her very clearest silken accents. She was not at all above making an impression on the new governess.

Hester felt relieved when she was gone with her and the scent of the tuberose. The white and yellow chrysanthemums and hot-house heliotrope which decked the apartment of Grizel and Helen were more agreeable. A clatter was heard now, and this spared any efforts at conversation on the part of those young ladies. It was Mackenzie with the tea.

"I have not had time to wash my hands; I shall be back in a moment. Excuse me," said Hester, and she hastened from the room.

The sisters looked at each other meaningly. "Vastly different from that horror Bonesmith," observed the eldest.

"Yes," said the second. "Mackenzie, what are you bringing us for tea? Grizel, look what there is on the table!—and, Mackenzie, my tonic: I will take it here, Griz: I am too tired—you won't mind this once?"

"It is so disgusting to take medicine anywhere but in your own room," observed her sister, rather sourly.

"I am too tired. The reaction has set in. Violent delights have violent ends, and the joy of Bonesmith's departure has been too much for me. Ugh! ugh! every time I taste this it seems worse; or is it the bottle getting low and all the delights being concatenated at the bottom? A bit of sugar; oh, quick, Mackenzie!"

"There is a cold pheasant—wonders! This is for the new governess." Grizel was inspecting the tea-table. "What's this her name is—Dalrymple? Rather nice-looking, I think. Sh—"

The door opened to admit the subject of the Honourable Grizel's comments, so she stopped and rose from her chair. Indicating the chair before the tea-tray she said, with a voice through which there rose the faintest note of authority:

"We have been waiting for you."

Hester made no answer, but began to pour the tea, which was excessively weak, into the cups.

"Do you take cream and sugar?" she asked of Grizel.

"Milk, no sugar, thank you."

"Half-milk for me, please, and no sugar," observed Helen, who was carving the cold pheasant.

Hester made a mental note of these idiosyncrasies, which she devoutly hoped were unvarying, and the meal proceeded. They spoke but little to her, but she felt that every motion, word, and look of hers were under close and not too friendly surveillance, and it was with a sense of release that the repast concluded and Mackenzie removed the *débris*.

"I suppose that you have preparation to make for to-morrow's studies?" she observed, turning to Grizel.

"Yes, rather. Miss Dalrymple, I will give you mamma's book of rules and you can look it over."

"Don't you want to unpack?" asked Helen, who had stretched herself again on her reclining board.

"Yes; my trunks have been brought up now. I shall not be very long."

"Oh, don't hurry," said Grizel amiably. "See, this is Tuesday evening. Well, at ten to-morrow I begin with Signor Scugnarelli; nine to ten we read for an Italian mistress; she comes at eleven on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Mondays; twelve to one it will be English history. You will sit in the room while Signor Scugnarelli teaches me. But there, see, is the book for yourself."



It was a leather-covered manuscript book, which Lady Rosston had caused to be bound and made for herself at the Co-operative Store. Each day of the week was printed, and each hour of the day marked off separately in her ladyship's own caligraphy. Seven o'clock was the hour for rising, eight for the school-room breakfast, a quarter of an hour of calisthenics before breakfast; half-past eight morning prayer; nine, study under the governess's supervision until ten. Then the music-master, or singing-master, or elocution-master appeared; every hour was filled until one. During all these hours and the language lessons Hester had to be present. At one they went out for a short walk, returning at a quarter to two to change their morning frocks and appear at lunch, which was the school-room dinner. After dinner they walked again. Then came the practising, sewing, reading aloud, preparation for the professors, until bed-time, which was appointed at half-past nine. Every hour was marked out for some task.

"You can take it to your room, you know," added Grizel, patronizingly. She had tried to assert an authority over Miss Dalrymple at first, and finding that unavailable now attempted to subdue her by a sort of half-friendly, half-contemptuous familiarity. Hester opened up her large steady eyes, and looked at her silently. She had been at a good boarding-school, and understood the *genus* girl tolerably well. She laid the book on one side calmly.

"Signor Scugnarelli at ten; from nine to ten what do you do? Practise for him?"

"No; we get up our Italian for Signora Maladetta, and read English History aloud to you three mornings of the week, or Political Economy, or work at Physical Geography with the globe and maps. Papa is always asking us where places are that are mentioned in the House."

"A Gazetteer would tell him that, but of course he wishes you to ascertain for yourselves."

"I have an hour of singing practice, and an hour of piano to do," observed Miss Grizel. "Helen, you have done yours. Can't sing directly after tea, so I'll take the piano first."

"Miss Dalrymple, will you hand me 'Baretti'?"

"The English volume?" asked Hester.

"I am working up this precious 'Promessi Sposi.' Miss Maladetta is so cross, and what the use of translating to a creature like her is I cannot make out. She knows next to nothing of English. Mamma says she has a fine Tuscan accent. At all events she teaches the Uptons, so she is good enough for us. Tell me the meaning of *adelanti*."

Then Grizel began to practise octave scales, and after them *arpeggio* exercises in a manner which showed her to be uncommonly skilled in *technique*.

"Who is your master for the piano?" asked Hester.

"Corta."

"Oh!"

"Do *you* know him?" questioned Grizel, half-turning round.

"He taught me," returned Hester, off her guard for once. She regretted it almost immediately.

"At the Academy, I suppose?" observed the Honourable Grizel, snubbingly, and determining the first time that potentate showed symptoms of good humour to ask Corta if this statement were the fact.

Hester made no reply. She understood the girl's manner at once, and determined to keep a watchful guard over herself for the future. She liked the delicate girl, Helen, better. Her face was more pleasant, though not nearly so well-favoured, her manner more reserved, and at the same time more amiable; in fact, better bred than that of her showy elder sister, who was now performing all her most difficult and brilliant exercises with a view to impressing Miss Dalrymple. Hester read her purpose in the very expression and set of her back and head, and read the book of rules with unflagging attention. At last a dissonance in a pretty and very difficult exercise piece of Rubenstein made her utter an exclamation. The performer looked round with an expression of displeasure.

"You have played the syncopated passage all wrong," observed Hester. "The double sharp falls *between* those two melody notes in the bar."

"Indeed," replied Grizel, who was anything but pleased; "would *you* mind playing it for me, please?"

She looked as if she did not expect this offer to be accepted, and there was a veiled sneer in her voice.

"Yes, to be sure," returned Hester, simply, "if my fingers are not rusty with want of practice."

She ran the said fingers up and down the key-board with a brilliancy that made the sisters exchange meaning glances, then played the study from beginning to end with fire and precision. She rose then and calmly resumed her study, and Grizel left off trying to astonish such an expert as the new governess had proved herself to be, and went straight to the lesson allotted for her by the great Corta.

Hester left the pair together now, and went to her room to unpack her boxes.

## CHAPTER IV.

## PUPILS AND TEACHERS.

It was perhaps fortunate that she had a task of the kind to engage her energy and distract her attention, for the behaviour of her two pupils had chilled her to the heart. She was not addicted to castle-building, but she had permitted herself to entertain visions of impressionable young creatures, full of life and gaiety; troublesome and giddy perhaps, but ingenuous and open-hearted, with all youth's freshness and wildness, but with its candour and innocence also. Grizel and Helen were two women of the world. Their mother was scarcely less unsophisticated. There could be no kindly, semi-friendly relations between them and herself; it was impossible. These cold-eyed, critical, inquisitorial, worldly-minded girls, whose one thought seemed to be to discover how much she knew; to apply the commercial test to her, to ascertain if the stipend of £40 a-year was merited or not. Hester's clear eyes had seen through these mean devices: how shallow they were, how unkind! And then, kneeling before a great trunk,



which she was emptying that it might be carried away to the box-room, a hot blush overspread her face. "What right have I to complain? why should they not criticize me? I am a paid servant, and must render my due. I will think no more of them and their childish tricks, and shall assert myself. I am placed in authority over them, and the best thing I can do, in justice to Lady Rosston and myself, is to hold and maintain the upper hand." And then the feeling of loneliness, of isolation, the craving for human sympathy, once more overtook poor Hester. She was but twenty—not yet twenty, to tell the truth—and it was a lonely, stony road that she had marked out for herself. She would infinitely rather have made friends with Grizel and Helen, than keep them at a distance and domineer over them. They were at that moment engaged in quarrelling over a novel, in quest of which Grizel had descended to her mother's dressing-room, and which, defying La Tulle the French maid, who made round eyes of horror at her, she had carried off in triumph. They left her no choice; she must do her duty. The resolve cost her some tears as she hung up her dresses in the wardrobe, and folded away her belongings in the drawers. It was late when she had finished the process of unpacking, and ordered her apartment to her liking. Velvet and morocco-framed photos covered the mantelpiece; the meagre bookshelves were fitted with nicely-bound books; one or two pretty trifles were disposed here and there. Her handsome dressing-case, a birthday gift from her

aunt, stood on the toilet-table. Her ivory brushes and silver-topped bottles were ranged in their places as she had been accustomed to place them. Her leather writing-case almost filled the table. Mackenzie was highly pleased when she came next morning to "do" the governess's room to observe the elegance of her compatriot's appurtenances, for she believed in her heart that Miss Dalrymple was Scotch.

Hester looked round at the room with considerable satisfaction as she seated herself to peruse the rules once more.

"Breakfast at eight," she said to herself; "well, it *shall* be at eight. I was always fond of punctuality—wonder if my young friends are." Then she read a chapter of the Bible, said her prayers, and went to bed, falling asleep at last in the mould imprinted in it by the previous occupant, Miss Bonesmith. Hester tried ineffectually to struggle against it, but she rolled perpetually downhill back into the valley—and at last gave up the effort in despair.

The next morning at twenty minutes to eight, Hester was in the school-room. The fire was lighting, the breakfast-table laid, and the calisthenic implements laid out by Mackenzie on the side-table. Hester examined these, she knew them well enough; then she went over to the fire and stood there with her back to the over-friendly Mackenzie, who wanted in the kindness of her Scottish heart to make friends with her.

"Ten minutes to eight—five minutes to eight—

calisthenics at a quarter to eight. Pretty beginning!" thought the new governess, laying the book of rules down on the chimney-piece.

"Mackenzie, please go to the young ladies' rooms, and tell them that I am waiting."

"Eh! they know that, Miss Dalrymple, just as well as you and I do," replied Mackenzie. "They're just trying it on; they know you are young and fresh to the work, and they'll play on you if you're fool enough to let them, miss. They're up and dressed this long time. I have the waking of 'em, and I take good care I do it. I know 'em, eh! that I do; Miss Grizel, she's a nice one if she's let—"

"Good morning, Miss Dalrymple, I hope you slept well."

This from Grizel, "the nice one," in her silkiest voice and accent, advancing as she spoke, followed by her sister Helen. Both seemed blandly unconscious of any dereliction of duty. Miss Dalrymple fixed her wide grey eyes sternly upon both, and replied gravely:

"Good morning, good morning; I beg to know why you were not here to meet me at twenty minutes to eight." She took up the rule-book and read from it, "'Calisthenics at a quarter to eight'; or do you intend your mother's rules to go for nought?—I must speak to Lady Rosston after breakfast. Mackenzie, as soon as it is convenient to Lady Rosston to receive a message, give her my compliments and say that I desire a few words with her at her earliest convenience."

"Yes, miss," answered Mackenzie, with the keenest satisfaction apparent in her face and voice.

The sisters exchanged glances, and breakfast began in silence. When it was over, and Mackenzie had prepared the table for the morning's work, Helen addressed Miss Dalrymple.

"We sat up rather late last night, Miss Dalrymple, and if you will overlook our not coming to calisthenics this morning, it will not occur again, I promise you."

Hester looked up rather surprised. Had this request been proffered by Grizel she might have been tempted to slight it; but it was Helen who spoke, leaning rather weakly on the table as she did so, and meeting Miss Dalrymple's scrutiny with an appealing look in her blue eyes. Her sister Grizel had turned her back and was fumbling among her books at her own writing-table.

"Mamma will be so angry with us—so vexed," continued Helen.

Hester inclined her head gravely. "I shall accept your promise that it does not occur again. Mackenzie," she added, to that young person, who was listening with an irate countenance, "you need not deliver my message to Lady Rosston."

From this they passed to prayers, and then Hester went to her reclining board, and the *Student's Hume* was read aloud by Hester until a quarter to ten. Questions as to the subject of her reading occupied the time until Mackenzie, breathless from her rapid ascent of the stairs, announced, "Signor Scugnarelli."

Grizel, who really loved her music, seized a bundle of exercises and songs, and accompanied by Hester descended to the drawing-room. An Italian professor, who in appearance strongly resembled the portrait of Farinelli in Hogarth's renowned picture, was already sitting at the piano. A couple of housemaids fled on the ladies' entrance. The fire had but just been lighted, and Scugnarelli coughed and looked at the black mass emitting puffs of smoke and occasional blazes of wood, and kept on his comforter. "Let us commençh, *ut—re—mi—mademoiselle*," and he struck some fine chords on the Broadwood grand, a superb instrument. The rich sympathetic tone made Hester sigh.

"*Ut—sol—sol—sol—ut*," sang Grizel, powerfully but unmusically.

Hester began to sew, sitting opposite the fire. By degrees the exercises were abandoned for a song. The fire lighted up, and Scugnarelli, who was a real artist, forgot the chilly atmosphere of the room, and loosened the white silk comforter, allowing to be seen a fat throat swelled out with singing like that of a prize canary. Every now and again he emitted a fine melodious note in unison with his pupil. Hester's soul was awakened and listened, and she sang the song internally infinitely better than Grizel. She sewed her crewels all wrong. Scugnarelli, without even suspecting it, was teaching two pupils, not one.

That quiet, elegant-looking "Miss," the new governess, at whom he had thrown some utterly unavailing glances



of admiration, was listening to every word with rapt attention, and sighed in concert with him when Grizel, as she invariably did, failed to interpret the soul of some classic masterpiece. She never rose beyond a "correct noise." She sang her notes pretty truly, and her mezzo-soprano was flexible, but more she could not: it was not in her. The blonde cold Northern could not render the Italian passion and fervour of Verdi. Her master took the music off the stand at last and made her sing an English ballad.

"A zimpel ballade, as dey say," observed he, sardonically; "nothing so difficul' in de world as zimplizity—try, dear mamzelle."

Mamzelle tried with much the same result, and the lesson which lasted fifty minutes, cost a guinea, and was reckoned an hour, ended. Scugnarelli tightened up the muffler, put on fur gloves, bowed gracefully with the aid of his hat, and betook himself to an air-tight brougham that was waiting to convey him round the corner to another fifty minutes for a guinea.

Miss Grizel and Hester hurried up-stairs, Hester this time carrying the music, to meet Miss Maladetta, who came to read Mauzoni, and chatter Italian. Hester joined in the reading of the 'I Promessi Sposi,' but wisely declined the conversation. Grizel made the same grammatical blunders perpetually, and talked three times as much as her sister. Miss Maladetta was a grimy-coloured little elderly woman. She had come to London originally as a lady's-maid to a noble dame,

and as soon as she had learned a little English started on her own account as a teacher. She was a good-natured little grub, subservient to everybody. The great people all liked her, from the servant who let her in to the noble master to whom she always made a reverence when she met him on the stairs.

“Detto, det—to,” she cried to the Honourable Grizel; “Vossignoria dica dettha. Dat is ’ow de Irish do: dey say ‘*Tutho detho fatho*,’—’*orribile!* ’*orribile!*”

At that instant a persuasive, insinuating tap sounded at the door. It wanted a few minutes of twelve; and the Maladetta, who like the Scugnarelli had another engagement round the corner, was already insinuating her grimy little yellow hands into a pair of awful old gloves.

“Come in,” said Grizel languidly.

The door opened to give admission to a rather striking personage. A short, tolerably thick-set figure, to which very tight lacing alone preserved the remains of a waist; just as a spotted veil, which extended to the tip of her nose, cast an illusive shadow over a complexion formed of Bloom de Ninon and pearl-powder. The eyebrows were *postiche*, like the colour of the hair, that was frizzed and tufted above them; and the lids of the beady restless eyes were touched up with some blonde stuff.

“Signora Maladetta, perdona, perdona! *Come si fa*,” cried Miss Boldene, for it was she, shaking hands with the personage addressed; “do I disturb? Not for the

world would I; but I was so anxious on dear Grizel's and Helen's account to—" Then as warmly as she dared for fear of her perishable tints she embraced dear Grizel and Helen, who submitted passively enough.

All the time that she spoke she was devouring Hester with her eyes. Grizel, in obedience to some occult hint, murmured "Miss Dalrymple—Miss Boldene." Hester bowed. She was not impressed by the visitor, whose patronizing tone to Miss Maladetta caught her ears unpleasantly.

"*So* pleased to make your acquaintance. I have heard *so much* of you from dear Mrs. Greville. What a dear creature she is!—so devoted, so charitable, so excellent. I *am* so fond of her."

Hester had a grain of humour. "She tells us what her company is, that we may see what she is," thought she, a trifle satirically; but she felt pleased the next moment to know that there existed in this world of Curzon Street a connecting link between her and her old friend.

"You know Mrs. Greville, then?" she asked, interrogatively.

Miss Boldene stared at her open-eyed. Surely the girl could not be unaware of the fact that she owed her own existence in the Rosston mansion to her, Malvina Boldene's, good offices. How very, very odd! How wrong of Mrs. Greville not to have informed her! Could—could this be meant for impertinence? Miss Dalrymple was young and inexperienced; she perhaps was giving

herself airs: did not know probably the position of the person to whom she was speaking.

At that moment, Miss Maladetta, having collected her books, pencils, etc., into a sealskin bag, which had bald spots on it here and there, rose to go; and, poor soul, held out her hand in leave-taking to Miss Boldene. That lady, however, bent on asserting to Hester her dignity and consequence, deliberately ignored the proffered hand, and squaring her elbows, bowed in royal fashion over her clasped hands. A spark shone in the Italian's black eyes as she bowed all round on her way to the door.

Hester saw all this, and was puzzled tremendously. Who could the visitor be? She was dressed handsomely enough, but her clothes, though originally expensive, had a scrubby, ill-fitting look about them. Her bearing and manner were assumed, and seemed to fit no better than the dress and mantle. Miss Boldene began a conversation with the girls—if a series of inane flatteries merit the name.

“How *beautifully* you speak!—really your Italian is superb, you accomplished creatures. I shall be quite afraid of you both. Helen, love! are you not tired of that board?”

Hester felt uncertain for an instant what to do, and eyed the visitor, rather dubious if it would be proper to quote the rule-book, and recall Grizel and Helen to their duties, or if she were expected to entertain the visitor.

"Poor sweet!" continued this last, "and how well you bear it! At your age *I* never—"

"I rather like it," remarked Helen curtly, opening a book on a stand beside her.

"And how goes on your singing, Griz, love? Miss Dalrymple, have you heard her voice?—a perfect *prima donna*, I assure you. Grizel, all *I* say is—and *I* have heard the best singers before you were born, my love—that such a *mezzo-soprano* as yours does not exist in London: our Saint Cecilia, I call her."

"Who in the world can this woman be?" thought Hester; "and why does she talk such nonsense?" Then she observed that Helen, whose expressive face wore a most unmistakable sneer, was deliberately reading her *Mrs. Fawcett*. Grizel's vacuous smile was all the encouragement Miss Boldene had.

"Miss Dalrymple," cried this last suddenly, "this is a visit *to you*. Mrs. Greville has recommended you strongly to my good graces. I shall tell you about that later. You must come to see me; come to tea, I am quite alone. Two thousand and two, Park Street: you are free you know at—er, four, is it, Grizel?"

"*Sometimes*," interpolated Helen, "not always, Miss Boldene. You had better ask mamma. You see Miss Dalrymple only came last evening, she is hardly up to the ways of the house, even aided by the rule-book," continued sharp Helen, alluding to her new governess's inveterate habit of regarding that sacred volume.

Grizel, who was sitting on the music-stool, adapting



herself to the character of Saint Cecilia as best she knew how, did not understand a word of her sister's speech. Hester did, and thinking of the morning's incident laughed. "Thank you, Miss Boldene," she replied; "you are extremely kind, but my poor aunt requires any spare time that I may have. I do not," she added, a little daringly, and with a glance at the rule-book, "observe any set down here."

Miss Boldene put up a gold eye-glass, and surveyed the speaker through it. The effect of the eye-glass, complicated by the spotted complexion veil, ought to have been terribly severe, but it was altogether lost on the thick coil of Miss Dalrymple's back hair, she having unconcernedly turned aside to open a drawer.

Miss Boldene dropped her eye-glass and became civil. "It might be," she reflected, "that this girl was *a* Dalrymple; after all, such things have happened before."

"I am disturbing the established order, I fear," she murmured sulkily; "I shall go down-stairs. Mrs. Greville recommended you *so particularly* to me; dear Miss Dalrymple, forgive my intrusions."

"Did she?" exclaimed Hester, half-disarmed. "How kind and thoughtful of her! I shall see her soon, I hope, and thank her."

"Don't run off," said Grizel, who hoped for more compliments, turning herself on the creaking music-seat.

"Must, darling, must! I shall see you again though. Adieu, adieu."

Out she went floating in a perfect steam of affection.

"Means to stop to lunch," observed Helen acidly. "Won't papa be angry!"

"Please to listen," requested Miss Dalrymple, and for at least half an hour the school-room knew no other sound than that of the nervous English of the *Student's Hume*.

One o'clock struck by the little red granite clock on the chimney-piece.

"I shall be ready in two minutes or less," observed Miss Dalrymple, disappearing as she spoke.

She reappeared dressed for the walk, and her attire merited the approbation of her two charges. A close crape bonnet, with a fine lace veil, a handsome fur coat, good gloves and boots.

"We will go into the Park," observed Grizel.

"Yes," remarked Helen, "by all means the Park; I feel in the humour to see it once more. Mackenzie, Mackenzie! do bring me a better pair of gloves: and, Griz, let us bring the dogs."

A collie and three pugs added themselves to the party, as they descended the stairs. They proceeded into Park Lane by the nearest route, Grizel holding herself very erect indeed, and walking a step and a half in advance of the others. Hester allowed herself to be led: they held their way straight along from the corner to Kensington Gardens, walking pretty quickly. Helen, when it was time to return, took Miss Dalrymple's arm,

on which she leaned heavily. She was an overgrown, weakly creature, and Hester assisted her with goodwill. As they ascended the steps of the house in Curzon Street, an elderly but well-preserved gentleman was getting off a horse at the door. It was Lord Rosston.

He nodded amicably to his daughters, and bestowed a slightly scrutinizing glance on their new governess. It was only momentary.

"The new recruit—respectable anyhow, that's something these days," murmured his lordship, as he followed them up the steps. The door was already open; a man in undress led the horse away round to the mews.

"Now, be quick, girls! I'm quite famishing," cried Lord Rosston, as they ascended the great staircase. The dogs darted into an open doorway, and he was following them into Lady Rosston's morning-room, whence resounded the, to him, displeasing voice of Miss Boldene.

"I thought so," murmured Helen to herself, but half aloud. "Thank you, Miss Dalrymple. I hope I have not tired you. We must go down at once; papa hates to be kept waiting."

Miss Dalrymple and her charges were first in the dining-room. Hester thought it looked oddly different from the day on which she had her interview with Lady Rosston. There was more light, but this time there was no fire. Lord Rosston had some odd ways of

his own of practising economies : one was to save all the flyleaves of letters and write notes upon them. The servants were all on board wages, and he insisted on the remnants of dishes being brought up over and over again for his own consumption. He and Lady Rosston breakfasted in the morning-room, and as it was scarcely worth while to light a fire for luncheon, the dining-room was left without one until dinner, at eight o'clock ; and in the library he practised a really painful economy. In the hall, in the housekeeper's room and butler's pantry, servants' hall and the harness-room, the domestics enjoyed fires which they stoked like furnaces ; the maids conducted correspondence upon the very best cream-laid : my lady, thinking that she was in her turn economical, laid in huge supplies from the co-operative stores. She did what she liked. Lord Rosston gave her her own way in everything, and contented himself with a few economies of the sort above described, which made him happy and hurt nobody.

He did not like Miss Boldene. If he was economical he was not mean, and Miss Boldene was both.

"Poor dear Granville Flether," Miss Boldene was proclaiming. "You have no idea of the talent he has, poor boy, and he is so good to his old aunt ; I am so anxious to do him a good turn."

"Umph !" grunted Lord Rosston, and added to himself : "or some one on his back."

"I am not going to give anything this side of Christmas, Malvina," said Lady Rosston with decision ; "for

that matter, even were it the season, I really believe music goes down better than these recitations."

Henry and Charles, the two footmen, together with the butler, took their leave now. The plates had been changed, everything was on the table, and it was the habit of this family to help themselves.

"Helen," said Lord Rosston, "I order you to drink that claret; if you do not, you shall have a second glass."

"Oh, papa!"

"Miss—er—Dalrymple" (good name, he thought, and the creature looks it too), "let me send you a little of this."

"Thank you," said Miss Dalrymple, frankly. Grizel handed the plate for her, and he helped her good-humouredly to a choice portion. One of Bonesmith's tricks was to eat, or to pretend to eat, nothing—just as Miss Boldene did: she was asked if she would have some more *salmi*.

"O—o—oh no, thank you; *I eat so little*," was the reply, and a stereotyped one. It seemed to say, "I stayed to lunch just as a compliment to you all,—not for any carnal need of my own—oh no!"

Lord Rosston's economy was purely personal. He was a genuine English gentleman, and kindly. He took the claret-jug in his hand and rose.

"Papa," cried Helen in alarm, mistaking his intentions, and she caught up her glass and gulped its contents. "There! I have drunk it all up."

But he passed her by and offered to pour some for Miss Dalrymple.



"No, thank you; really I do not drink wine; thank you, no."

"Are you a total abstainer?" he asked.

"Well, yes," she answered, blushing a little, "I do not like wine."

"Well, well; I heard the other day some Irish story; never could recollect a story. I've no sense of humour—never had. Lord Blathercuddy was telling it at the Carlton—that in Ireland, claret was a total abstainer's favourite beverage."

Miss Boldene laughed immoderately and seemed to appropriate the remarks, though she had had two glasses of sherry.

"Miss Dalrymple is *not* Irish, and she takes the advantage of the fact," observed Lady Rosston rather at random: she was pleased to find that her new venture was a total abstainer. It was decorous, and at the same time economical: she also was economically inclined, but in a different spirit from her lord.

"No, thank you; not even if it were a permitted beverage: I dislike wine."

Miss Boldene approved highly, and nodded and smiled to Hester, and from her to Lady Rosston. Miss Dalrymple's behaviour was commendable, and she, her patroness, assumed all the credit of the occasion.

Hester was puzzled by her, and wondered what she meant by paying her so much attention. Unworldly as she was, and totally without experience, something warned her against Miss Boldene. Her artificial

manner and complexion were unprepossessing in the extreme, and her rudeness to the Italian governess had left something approaching to dislike in Hester's mind.

Lunch over, the young ladies mounted once more, slowly and reluctantly, to the school-room and the rule-book; the reclining board, the tonic bottle, the piano practice for *Signa Corta*, beguiled away the short wintry afternoon.

Hester speedily made up her mind that she had an invaluable opportunity of improving her knowledge of Italian, and of music—German the girls knew thoroughly, like English; perhaps rather better. From seven to eight o'clock in the evening, when Grizel and Helen betook themselves to their mother's dressing-room to spend an hour in relaxation, watching her being dressed for the evening, and playing with the pugs and the Angora cats, Hester opened the piano, a good one and kept in good order, and practised her singing, and ran through Clementi's 'Gradus' to keep her fingers in order.

Lady Rosston prided herself upon her methodical habits, and imitated the Queen in her punctuality as well as in her personal control of times and hours. Every hour of the day was filled by its allotted task. As they were varied skilfully, monotony became impossible; but it was close work and hard work—too much for Helen, who had brains and ambition, and took an intellectual interest in her task. The teachers were the best

to be had for money, and had the gift of being able to interest their pupils. Grizel, who was by nature dull of apprehension and devoid of all love of learning, took everything mechanically, and so escaped all strain. Besides, she rode out at least a couple of times a week with her father. Not in the park : Lady Rosston would not allow that, to Grizel's mortification. Helen was not able for horse exercise, and was thus thrown more into her governess's society. It was impossible not to like her ; but Hester kept sharp control over herself, and never allowed the hard fact of her being a *paid* dependant to escape her own consciousness. Helen might caress and coax as best she could, Miss Dalrymple never unbent, and she had good reason to be satisfied with her prudence in this respect. For one day the Ladies Mildred and Gladys and Guinever Upton came to tea and dancing in the school-room. They were the daughters of the lovely and fashionable Duchess of Upton. Grizel and Helen were in an inferior position for the nonce, and made Hester feel it.

Grizel had brains enough to be rude, and used them for the purpose, and Helen talked to Miss Dalrymple in a semi-patronizing, semi-commanding manner, which was quite new to her. Hester was intensely amused. At first she was a little hurt, inclined to be vexed ; but it was all so childish, so artificial, that she ended by laughing internally, and enjoying the situation.

They were practising a new waltz, and a fashionable teacher, with her assistant who played the violin in a

corner, had taken Lady Rosston's house in its turn. One day she gave the lesson at the Duchess of Upton's, another day at the Marchioness of —, a cousin of Lord Rosston's; next day at Lord Rosston's. This day it happened that the Marchioness' daughter had influenza and could not attend, so a partner was wanted for the Lady Guinever. Miss Dalrymple was out of the question; she volunteered to play, and the violinist, a sister of Madame Entrechatte, danced with Lady Guinever, a fat undersized blonde of sixteen.

Hester's music was really superb, and caught the attention of the Lady Mildred, who was dancing with Grizel.

"How remarkably well your governess plays!" she observed languidly; "Signor Corta played that waltz for us the other day: she is every bit as good."

Grizel reddened with delight. When they had departed she sauntered into Hester's room, and said to her with a voice and manner copied exactly from that of the eldest of the Uptons, a beautiful girl of seventeen:

"You play tho thplendidly, Mildred said; quite as well as Corta."

Hester was finishing a letter: she folded it before replying.

"Is it not time that you began your singing practice?" was her reply, taking out her watch.

Next Sunday she was free after church, and went at once to visit her aunt. She was not particularly uneasy about her, having seen how quickly and even cheerfully

she had accommodated herself to her new life and surroundings.

She found her in the common sitting-room of the house, a curious apartment, the most striking features of which were a preternatural quantity of antimacassars and artificial plants, tolerably disguised in dust. There was a good fire, and some comfortable chairs stood near it, and in one of these her aunt was installed. She had on her best mourning dress, and her best white crape widow's cap and bands. Hester was astonished to find her down-stairs. She seemed well and contented, and almost cheerful; but before Hester had been many minutes with her, she recognized a marked alteration in her. There was something indescribable in her manner—a flightiness and discursiveness that was new. The sudden shock consequent on the change of life and habits, was no doubt the cause of all this. Hester sat with her and talked to her, giving her an account of her new life and her duties in Curzon Street; Mrs. Vining listened half-vacantly. The conversation was really one-sided; she had new interests, new surroundings, and beyond a passing and civil show of attention to what her niece was saying, seemed to care for nothing outside the walls of her novel residence. In return for Hester's recital she had a curiously disconnected account to give of a civil war going on in the house upon a question of precedence between old Miss —— and old Mrs. ——, and the curious lack of principle and consistency shown by the mistress of the establish-



ment in relation to the same. She complained of nothing; said she was very comfortable; that the maid who attended to her room was civil and obliging.

"Do not be uneasy about me, dear," she said, with an odd return to her old natural kindly manner; "I have all I want. If you are only as well off, we have much to be thankful for."

Hester understood her at once, put her arms round her, and kissed her over and over again.

"I *am* well off, Aunt Hester. Everything is better than I expected—ininitely better. I have not a single complaint to make."

Not one that she *would* make. She never said a word of the loneliness; of the forced reserve and constraint; the never-ending self-watchfulness and repression; the endless temptations held out to her by Helen, who chose to offer the governess all her hours of spleen and sickly ill-humour, to turn upon her afterwards and insult or snub her, or twit her with her own lapses into natural friendliness. No; Hester locked up all her troubles in her own brave, constant heart, and taking the widow's hand in hers, they sat together over the fire until the clock warned her to depart, and quietly she left with regretful unwillingness. Her loyal, affectionate heart clung to the drooping old creature, who, to judge by her own conversation, needed her so little. It was to Hester an immense relief, though anything but a joyous one, to feel herself once more in free air. Strange, and ugly, and unhappy as the room and the

occasion were, Hester felt a sense of rest and freedom that she had not known since the day that her destiny and a four-wheeler had taken her to Curzon Street; not even when she crept at night into the valley marked in the bed by her predecessor, Miss Bonesmith.

Something warned her that even this consolation would not long be hers, and she remained with her aunt until the time appointed for her return had almost elapsed.

On her road back by way of Park Lane she encountered Miss Boldene; her would-be patroness was walking with two very distinguished-looking ladies. Hester was hastening along in the middle of the path, and met her face to face. Miss Boldene saw her distinctly; and instead of acknowledging the timid, modest salutation, which in the innocence of her heart Miss Dalrymple presumed to offer, stared her straight in the face, and flung her painted countenance to one side. Hester was hurt and mortified at first by this rudeness, but her good sense came to her assistance speedily, and she laughed outright.

"What business have I to expect better usage than Miss Maladetta?" she asked herself, calling to mind the incident in the school-room.

Miss Boldene's dignity, or what she chose to consider by that name, was in constant peril, being of a singularly adventitious kind, and dependent wholly upon circumstances. When in the company of persons of rank it vanished altogether. Nothing could be more

humble, more cringing, than her attitude of mind and body; but she indemnified herself for all this by behaviour such as has been described to the Maladettas and Dalrymples, or rather Bonesmiths, for she had found Hester's predecessor as willing and forgiving as a bran-cushion. Miss Boldene, who had not a resource of any description within herself, and literally and in every sense lived abroad, mind and body, had another society which, while fringing upon that of May Fair, was perfectly distinct, and in a way remote. It was in this outer ring that she knew, and in a way was intimate with, the Grevilles. She gave herself huge airs among the set, and exacted and obtained much homage and influence therein. A large number of them liked to know of the great world and its doings, and Miss Boldene assumed to be one of its leading pieces of mechanism. She went to dinners innumerable among them—going in an omnibus, and sponging upon some one who had a brougham or a fly to drop her on the way home. She led a busy, idle, serviceable, and useless kind of life, and was on the whole more good than bad. To hear her talk one would imagine her a guiding light in literature, home and foreign; whereas she never was guilty of reading a book through, and took her judgments wholesale from the newspapers, or sucked the brains of anybody who was incautious enough to let fly an original opinion within hearing of her. Truly, as a Frenchman says, there are many echoes but very few voices in this world.

Had she bowed to Miss Dalrymple, Lady Minerva Shuter and her daughter, with whom she was walking, might have asked—Miss Dalrymple being uncommon-looking—who she was. To be sure the question might be considered ill-bred, but who stood on ceremony with Miss Boldene? To have been obliged to reply, Lady Rosston's new governess, would have been very flat and unprofitable. So prompt in denials always, she cut that young person, whom it was also desirable to teach that there was a considerable interval between her and Miss Boldene's social rank.

On the first of December they all went to Nice, where things went on as usual. Lord Rosston hunted, and made now and again little runs to Monaco, Lady Rosston entertained and was entertained, and the lessons went on as usual without the aid of Messieurs and Mesdames Corta, Scugnarelli, Maladetta, and Entrechattes. Helen was ordered by the doctors to be out a great deal: Hester and Grizel invariably accompanied her pony-chair. Singing and piano-practice were the chief occupations of the last-named; at least Lady Rosston recommended her eldest daughter to give her time chiefly to music, and her youngest to rest herself. The truth was that she felt that Miss Dalrymple was fulfilling her promise and something more, and that in fact she was giving better value for her forty pounds a-year than any other governess ever did for eighty. She liked the girl personally also, and felt inclined to be kind and

friendly to her whenever she had time, which was not often. Lord Rosston also took her into his good graces, and paid especial attention to her whenever he encountered her at table, not condescendingly, but good-naturedly.

One day Hester was superintending Grizel's singing-practice, and that young lady happened to sing with more than usually execrable flatness. She sat down in desperation and sang the exercise for her. Grizel was astounded.

"Miss Dalrymple!" she exclaimed. It was the first time that she had heard her governess sing, and although she was incapable of appreciating the artistic truthfulness with which every note was given, the volume and power of the voice impressed her tremendously. "There, take it so," said Hester. "Sol—do—sol;—sol."

"Sing me this; please do." Grizel put one of her own songs before Miss Dalrymple. "I always miss the flat in that run."

Hester consented. She was in the middle of the performance when the door opened and Lady Rosston entered. Grizel had forgotten her affectation—Helen was sitting up straight on the floor.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "I knew it was not you, Grizel, love, but I never dreamt it could be Miss Dalrymple. Pray go on; don't stop."

Hester sang straight through the song obediently. Lady Rosston listened with wide open eyes.

"My dear Miss Dalrymple, your voice is magnificent.



How is it that I have never heard you before?—that I never even heard of you? Who taught you?—but you mentioned Scugnarelli. Extraordinary!—perfectly extraordinary!”

She was genuinely astonished, and began at once to think what an addition Miss Dalrymple would be to her in her *soirées*. The Duchess of Upton was at the Hotel de —; Lady Grace Cobham, Lady Dorkington, all “musical.”

“Will you sing for me to-night? I have a few people coming; I should so like to let the Duchess hear you.”

Hester turned round on the music-stool with a kind of terror. “Oh, Lady Rosston, please! I had so much rather not.” Her cheeks flushed crimson and her eyes dilated.

“Why not, pray?” questioned Lady Rosston, a little sharply.

“I am in mourning—in deep mourning,” returned Hester, through whose frame a shiver of terror passed.

The fact was apparent. There was no contradicting it. She wore crape and paramatta. Lady Rosston’s nostril curled a little impatiently. People who are *paid* have no right to have feelings. It was so provoking, and a gifted amateur who recited had just failed her. She was vexed, and showed it; a flush mantled under her pearl-powder.

“And I am so untaught as yet,” added Hester,

dreading the cultured criticism of a room full of Lady Rosstons and Miss Boldenes, though that immortal type had happily been left behind in London. "I am really not fit to sing to anybody. I had only twenty lessons from Signor Scugnarelli."

"Oh, he gave you lessons? Why did you not have more?" questioned Lady Rosston.

"Because we went abroad, and I was to have begun again when we came back, but my uncle's illness and death . . ."

Lady Rosston rose at once. "Since you wish it, I shall excuse you, Miss Dalrymple; but you really have a magnificent contralto—magnificent."

"Mamma," said Helen, laying down her embroidery as she spoke, "do ask her to sing you '*Voi che sapete*.' It is such a delightful song."

Hester obediently placed the music on the stand. Lady Rosston posed herself in a critical attitude in the window, and Grizel, forgetting for once her "three-quarters" attitude, sat and listened attentively. Hester was nervous at first, but, as was usual with her, as soon as she got into her song, forgot everything else and let her really splendid voice go. The foreign room, with its parquet floor and uncurtained windows and doors, offered no impediment to the proper spreading of the waves of sound, and when Lord Rosston, who was passing along the corridor, put in his head, he was so attracted by the unwonted melody that he entered and stayed to the end.

"I have no ear for music, you know, so you can take my compliment for what it is worth, but that is really delightful." This much he said very formally to Hester. Then to his wife—"Really quite superb! I fancied it was Grizel at first, but she has a more powerful—*timbre*—you know." Then with a pleased nod, which took the party in proper order, first Miss Dalrymple, then Grizel and her mother, and ending with Helen on her reclining board, a scholastic compliment which had not been forgotten in London.

Grizel wanted Miss Dalrymple to sing at her mother's afternoons. She felt sure that she would be allowed to come down along with her governess, were it only for the benefit of hearing her own songs so well sung.

"Oh!" cried Grizel, who, as was her nature, took the whole of her father's compliment to herself, "oh, delightful! Miss Dalrymple. Oh! you dear, you will sing for mamma this afternoon." She actually laid one hand caressingly on the governess's shoulder.

Enraptured as Lady Rosston was with the singing, she could not stay for the second song which her eldest daughter, in her haste to pose on Miss Dalrymple's back, so to say, so eagerly demanded from her governess.

"Your mamma has excused me," observed Miss Dalrymple, rising at once to get rid of the patronizing contact of her hand.

"Yes, Grizel, how *can* you insist? You know Miss Dalrymple is in deep mourning."

This, in shrill accents, came from Helen, who saw

perfectly through her sister's manœuvre, and meant to nip its execution in the very bud ; half out of genuine good feeling for Miss Dalrymple, and half to thwart her elder sister, but she was doomed to disappointment. Miss Dalrymple resumed her seat beside the piano ; Grizel unwillingly sat down on the music-stool, and the room once more resounded with the harsh soprano notes.

## CHAPTER V.

## ON THE CONTINENT.

CHRISTMAS was spent at Nice. Hester felt the winter long and weary. Her aunt wrote to her frequently, but her letters were rather monotonous, and sometimes, but rarely, a little garrulous. Mrs. Greville wrote once or twice, and to Hester's comfort, if astonishment, told her that Miss Boldene gave her to understand that the Rosstons were rather more than satisfied with her in every respect. She also mentioned that she visited Mrs. Vining as often as she could; that she seemed comfortable, and in a way contented; but she added in one letter which Hester received about New Year's Day: "It is impossible for a woman at her time of life to undergo the shocks which Mrs. Vining has of late experienced, without an effect sooner or later appearing." Hester felt anxious to return to London, and the very day of their arrival in Curzon Street, a bare three days before Parliament opened, she asked leave of absence, and taking a hansom, made haste to the house.

She realized at once the import of Mrs. Greville's



letter. Her aunt was evidently breaking up, body and mind alike decaying rapidly. Hester felt thankful to be again in London, and on returning to Curzon Street, informed Lady Rosston of her aunt's illness, which she had been warned by the doctor was hopeless. She met more kindness and sympathy than she expected. Lady Rosston told her to go and see her aunt daily, and arranged with Miss Maladetta to relieve Hester of the task of supervising Corta, Scugnarelli, and the rest who had resumed the lessons. It was really a good-hearted, kindly act, and was performed in a gracious spirit. Hester gratefully acknowledged it, but there was no longer any need for it. Mrs. Vining died peacefully just three weeks after her niece's arrival in London; holding Hester's hand clasped in hers, and surrounded by all that could minister to her spiritual and corporal wants.

The Rosstons left for Paris the day before her death. Hester was to follow them after the funeral. She had taken up her residence in the house with her aunt for some days before the end. When that came, Mrs. Greville received her into her house, and she spent the last days of watching and grief within the reach, and in the company, of her kind friend.

The early days of March saw her once more at her post; this time in the 'Bristol,' a huge hotel much favoured by the English aristocracy, whither Lady Rosston and her daughters had repaired. Grizel and Helen were unfeignedly glad to see her again, and poor

lonely Hester almost forgot her proud reserve, and allowed herself to return their caresses and endearments. She was now almost completely alone in the world; save Mrs. Greville, whose benevolent motherly heart went out to the desolate young creature, she could hardly assure herself that she had a friend. It was no fault of hers; her late uncle's habits had been excessively retiring—he did not like to have strangers in his house. When she returned from school, she was obliged to decline her companions' invitations, and little by little they ceased to think of her, and she of them. Several of them wrote letters of condolence on seeing the notice of Mr. Vining's death in the newspapers, and to them Hester sent the customary acknowledgment. There were no relations apparently of either uncle or aunt. And it seemed to her when she turned away from the grave in Kensal Green, that she had left there all that the whole world contained belonging to her.

On her arriving at the Great Western Railway Station she was met by La Tulle, Lady Rosston's woman, who greeted her rather kindly, and with more effusion than in London. La Tulle was on her native heath, and looked remarkably bright and exalted. She took all trouble off Miss Dalrymple's hands—collected her luggage, engaged a *fiacre*, and in a very short space of time they were set down in the court-yard of the 'Bristol.' Lady Rosston and her Lord were dining out, and going to the theatre afterwards. Grizel and Helen

were spending the evening with an aunt, a sister of Lord Rosston's, a Vicomtesse de Treilles la Tour, who lived in the Champs Élysées. Hester was glad to have a quiet evening, and unpacked her trunks—as Mackenzie was out also—with La Tulle's aid, for she was greatly fatigued. She enjoyed a good night's rest, and found time in the early morning to write a hurried letter to Mrs. Greville to let her know of her safe arrival.

Her pupils were unfeignedly glad to see her; and Grizel, who could do nothing without posing, made a vast display of sympathy as well as affection. Helen was less demonstrative of either, but in her way she was a *poseuse* also. Grizel chose to gush, so she elected to fill the rational, sensible *rôle*, and each sister made a foil of and played off their airs on the other.

Hester had by this gauged both, and hardly knew which she trusted least. Grizel was standing beside her now, her arm round her waist, and her head reclining on Miss Dalrymple's shoulder, cooing affectionate speeches into the folds of her governess's crape collar. Hester longed for the coffee to come up, and afford her a pretext for shaking off the Honourable Grizel, who most assuredly might be expected to recoup herself for her condescension by a fit of idleness and insubordination after breakfast. Mackenzie arrived soon with a tray, and the morning meal was shortly despatched.

“Are you working? What are your mamma's plans? Where is the rule-book?”

"The rule-book is no use here," replied Helen. "At ten we have Monsieur Decor for conversation and French literature. You and Mackenzie both sit in the room. He's French, you know. At eleven we go out with papa to walk. But I think mamma was making you an order-book: very likely Barnes will bring it up to you; or La Tulle."

Her saying proved prophetic. Without much delay a footman knocked at the door and handed some pages of writing-paper scribbled over in pencil and pinned together. Hester read them over. The chief recommendation seemed to be that scrupulous attention be paid to Grizel's singing practice, as Signor Razzio was extremely *exigeant*; that the footman would attend them when they went out walking, and, as in London, there seemed to be plenty of work to do.

M. Decor made his pupils stand at the furthest end of the room, and sound the vowels in French. Hester found this way improving to herself; he scolded them once only for talking with their teeth shut.

"It ces like a voice from behind a door," he complained—"a paling," he muttered. "But I dare not say it—you English—*Pouah!*"

Then having finished a discourse on the *Romance of the Rose*, he bowed himself away, kissing his hands and spreading them out in valedictory benediction.

They hastened away to go with their father towards the Bois. Miss Dalrymple was sent for to Lady Rosston's room.

Hester found her ladyship in the hands of a French dressmaker. The room was filled with *échantillons*. Mackenzie and La Tulle were folding and unfolding rich stuffs, and handing things to the queer-looking woman who was fitting on Lady Rosston's superb dress.

"My dear Miss Dalrymple!"—she held out two plump jewelled hands across a stiff drapery that was being pleated up by the artist—"so glad to see you back; so good of you to come to us so soon. I assure you the dear girls were quite in a sad way to have you again. I had inquiries every day. You have obtained quite a hold on their affection. It gave me—er—really pleasure to know that you were missed; that the relations between you and them were so cordial."

She looked keenly at Miss Dalrymple, to see if this were properly met and appreciated.

"You agree with me, I am sure," she continued; "it is a compliment to—er—don't you, dear?"

"Yes," Hester made haste to answer; "it is, most assuredly. I am glad to find them so well."

"I want to ask you to take great pains with dear Grizel's singing. She is now taking lessons from Razzio—the great Razzio, you know. They are fabulously expensive, don't you know. Oh—*un peu plus de ce côté là*"—she said suddenly to the dressmaker, a hideously ugly Frenchwoman with a frizzed head and a thick yellow neck, the charms of which her dress, which was cut down to the collar-bone, displayed unstintedly.



"*Attendez donc, Miladi,*" replied this last calmly, speaking through a bunch of pins which she held between her lips, with the assured authoritative air of one who is past mistress of her art, and knows it. "*Voila comme ça !*"

Then La Tulle wheeled round the great cheval glass, as Lady Rosston surveyed herself critically. She was content, and more than content with the result, but it was not her nature to abandon even the semblance of domination—so she had some pins unpicked and put in again; some folds undraped and draped again. Hester took a chair and watched the process; it was pleasant enough in the great luxurious bed-room *au premier* with its blazing fire, which defied the smart frost outside. The warm velvet draperies and gilt furniture glimmered and sparkled in the mirrors with which the walls seemed to be completely covered. A heady perfume filled the air, warm, enervating, and exhilarating at the same time—violet-powder, heliotrope, tuberose—a bouquet that my lady had carried the night before lay on a *guéridon* close by; its jewelled holder set in a glass of water beside it. It was a little the worse for wear. The gardenias were turning brown at the edges; the violets were assuming the dull dry blue that heralds death.

The last pin was stuck into her ladyship's tightly-compressed figure: the last *pli* of lace laid; and the artist was standing a little away with her head on one side like a street sparrow's; Mackenzie and La Tulle were ejaculating ecstasies under their breaths; and Lady

Rosston, inwardly satisfied, but coldly critical outwardly, surveyed herself, then turned to Miss Dalrymple:

“Oh! what do you think of it?”

Hester started, girl-like; she had been lost in a reverie. She had not a particle of envy in her nature, and was, for her age, a marvel of common sense and practicalness. But the unusual sight, the surroundings, the warm sensuous atmosphere of luxury, had set her for the moment dreaming. She had lost sight of Lady Rosston—of the obsequious attendants, the sumptuous chamber; and her mental vision presented to her—vaguely yet recognizably—a shadow like that cast in a dim mirror, of a tall figure—her own—clad equally splendidly—smiling—triumphant-looking. Lady Rosston’s voice dispelled the illusion, as though she laid her finger on a soap-bubble.

“Beautiful!” she exclaimed, flushing. “I never saw so beautiful a dress.”

“That is not criticism,” observed Lady Rosston, smiling. “*Allons! La Tulle—otez vite*. I have to go out to *déjeuner*. Stay a second, Miss Dalrymple; I have a *petit mot* for you. Where are Grizel and Helen? Oh yes, gone for a walk with my lord.”

La Tulle and Mackenzie retired discreetly at the mention of a *petit mot*, as soon as they had aided their mistress to disrobe, and packed up the dress for the artist.

“I wanted to say to you, my dear,” she said, speaking cordially, and for once without any apparent

condescension, "how really pleased we all are to have you back. My lord, especially, considers you have a good influence over the children—er—the girls, I meant. Well—er—I know you have had some considerable troubles of your own—er—and you have our fullest sympathy. Pray consider yourself at complete liberty. We do not require any lessons, or work, or in short to do anything which might seem unsympathetic or unkind. I always," continued Lady Rosston, "make it a point to respect the feelings of others; especially"—she added with a grand air, imitated a little from her model, her Grace of Upton—"people—er—depending upon us."

Hester signified her attention by an inclination of her head, and waited, a little confused.

"I was wishing to point out to you that I desire particular attention to be paid to Grizel. She is just now at an age when—er—too close a supervision cannot be exercised. Now especially, do not leave her alone for an instant. Keep close to her. She is so like me—so impressionable—so plastic and nervous—quite the artist temperament; and the most watchful care is needed."

Hester assented mutely and respectfully, thinking to herself that Grizel was by no means likely to fly out of the window. In fact, the utter earthiness of nature which she had observed made her inclined to wonder what Lady Rosston could mean.

"I—ah!—we have so many relations in Paris, you

see, and society has such demands upon us, that my time, as in London, is pretty fully taken up; but I have every confidence in you, from what Miss Boldene, a distant connection, you know, of ours, told me, and from what I have seen. I have the utmost feeling of security in leaving the dear girls in your hands."

Hester bowed again, murmuring her thanks.

"Then—er—it would be much to your advantage to improve yourself. Monsieur Decor is a highly-spoken-of teacher of French literature and conversation; and Razzio, you know, is celebrated—altogether a European celebrity; that is why I have selected him for dear Grizel. I depend so much upon her voice, which is truly superb. She will have her first lesson to-morrow afternoon at his house. We postponed it until your return. I am afraid I have a *thé* at the Duchesse de Nois États; but Razzio's place is near. I might almost manage to drop you and Grizel there," reflected Lady Rosston. "We shall see. What I wanted to say was, your voice is powerful, and I know you will understand that I speak as a friend—it is *throaty*, you know—*throaty*—wants developing. We English sing as we speak, behind closed teeth." Her ladyship was quoting Scugnarelli. "But it is really a fine *mezzo-soprano*" (it was a genuine *contralto*). "In fact, Lord Rosston thinks you—I know you to be sensible, and not likely to have your head turned by flattery—that you ought to be a professional singer."

Hester opened her eyes wide.

"It is indeed kind of you to say so, Lady Rosston ; but—"

"Well," interrupted Lady Rosston, "perhaps I ought not to have *said* so ; but you know what a voice is now-a-days. I am told that Madame Caglia gets six hundred pounds for singing at a concert in the Albert Hall : four hundred ! she won't sing, I *know*, for less than two hundred at one's private party."

"Really !" exclaimed Hester.

"Just so : so you see what a voice is ;—what a fortune a voice is. My lord declares that you ought to go on the stage, opera, you know."

"That is out of the question, Lady Rosston," said Hester decidedly. "Nothing would induce me to do such a thing."

"Your family would disapprove, I suppose," observed Lady Rosston. She was before the mirror straightening her lace tie, and looking with pleased equanimity at the agreeable reflection of her made-up countenance which the *demi-jour* of the pink blinds caused to appear therein. "Er—Scotch people have old-fashioned ideas, I know."

"I am not Scotch, and I have no relations, I am sorry to say," observed Hester, a little shortly ; "it is most kind of you, Lady Rosston, and of his lordship too, to express such a complimentary opinion of my voice. I am most grateful to you."

"Well, well ! as you like, Miss Dalrymple, but remember what I say ; and so, you know, pick up from



Razzio, so that you can come down to my afternoons next season and sing for me. That will be of use to you."

The words rang in Hester's ears.

"Of use to me!" she repeated, as she ascended to the upper story: "how will that be of use to me?"

## CHAPTER VI.

## A EUROPEAN CELEBRITY.

THE appointed hour next day found Hester, Grizel, and Mackenzie all sitting in the ante-chamber of the great Razzio's *salle de leçons*. A stove heated the air, which was sickly with divers perfumes, of all of which tobacco formed the base: camellias stood here and there in *faïence* pots; hyacinths and scented narcissus bloomed in the windows; palms stood about in big oriental jars, and their long leaves, the tips of all of which were dead, scratched Hester's cheeks and neck, and poked themselves into her hair. At first, the room was most imposing in its aspect. The tints of the walls, the tapestry and curtains, the gleaming things, the rich *Aubusson* carpet, formed a bright *coup d'œil*. But after Hester had sat a while, her trained English eye remarked the griminess and uncleansedness of all this Parisian luxury, just as her trained English nose detected the unfailing *bouquet de Paris* under the superincumbent tobacco, frangipanni, incense, hyacinth, and the rest. The flowers which had looked so dazzling on their entry, on closer inspection confessed to having been up at night, and irreverent hands had deposited cigar-ash in their pots.

A *portière* of Algerian stuff, most elegantly draped, if dusty, hid a large low door, and muffled a noise of voices and music. Presently this ceased ; a servant opened the door, and muttering as he bowed "*par ici*," ushered them into a bigger room. A door on the opposite side shut not too gently as they entered ; a sound of laughter and a fluttering of skirts and trampling of high-heeled boots, showed that a "class" had gone out.

Hester looked round curiously. There were no curtains, no carpet in this room ; a polished parquet floor ; a bearskin at the piano ; luxurious chairs, books, pictures. Portraits in character of great singers hung on the walls. She was looking at Malibran when a rustle made her turn suddenly. Senor Razzio had entered and was bowing.

"Mees !—ah yes ; milady Rosstone. Charmed—*charmant* ! Ah yez ; we weel trai de woice—ver cole day."

He resembled a bird in his activity. In half a second he had bowed to Hester, nodded to Mackenzie, and indicated chairs to both, all the while uttering the aforesaid lucidities ; and was now sitting at the grand piano. Grizel, obeying his bright black eyes, took up her position beside him obediently. She had no time to assert herself—to assume a *pose*. He was too quick, too imperative ; his *fougue* swept all along before it : already he was banging at a *cadenza*. Suddenly he sang with a round sweet note like a thrush :—*ut re-mi-sol—ut—ut—ut : va donc*.

Hester listened to him with delight ; her blood seemed to circulate quicker ; all of a sudden she sat up in her chair, and leaned forward. But Grizel began, then her delight vanished promptly. Hester could see the back of the master's neck wrinkling, and the bristly curly hair which yet decorated the region immediately above and behind his ears stand out as if irritated by electricity.

" *C'est fausse—encore plus fausse,—flat,*" he cried aloud like one in pain.

He told Grizel that her ear was at fault, prescribed two hours' practice ; and then after a further examination which convinced him not merely of the intractable nature of her voice, but of the absolute or almost absolute dearth of intelligence to guide her expression :

" Do not accentuate the melody," he said, speaking French. " Leave the melody to take care of itself. The composer has made that secure ; sing the note only—simply, purely."

While Razzio was saying this his eye had been caught by Hester's look of appreciative attention. " A singing face ; what intelligence !" he muttered to himself. Then aloud, turning towards Grizel : " Once more this trille. You are mademoiselle's *gouvernante* : superintend her practice : hein ? "

Hester signified assent to these propositions.

" Good. You be good enough to come here and watch this run." He indicated with his finger a rather

complicated trille, which Grizel “bashed” most unmercifully.

“Miss Dalrymple sings superbly herself,” observed the young lady, patronizingly. “But her voice is contralto: mine is mezzo-soprano.”

“Oh, is it?” observed the master ironically. Grizel did not know if he meant her own or her governess’s organ. “*La bémol!*” he almost shouted. “Oh, mademoiselle, what a superb, powerful voice you have!—how you ill-use her! You will kindly observe, miss,” he said to Hester, “how false she sings. Observe that—note: not one taken fully, squarely. You have an ear; you sing? Sing that trille: begin—here at the second part.”

He struck some vigorous chords. The piano was a splendid Pleyel grand; the touch, masculine and full. Hester drew a deep breath of pleasure, expanded her chest, and let out her voice. As the room filled with its vibrations, Razzio’s face brightened and expanded. He drew himself up and cast an approving glance sideways at her. When she came to the trille where Grizel had been stopped she too showed her weakness. The first half-dozen little grace-notes were given all their value; but a transition was unmarked. The *la bémol* was taken clearly and truly, but she did not know how to manage her breath, and stamped the *finale* notes.

Razzio grunted and stopped playing. “Sing me down the scale:—*ut—se—la—sol.*”

Hester took him up at *me*, and sang down to the



lowest note of her register—a *bonâ fide* contralto of superb *timbre* and undoubted power.

"Now, loud—louder!" cried Razzio, who was to all appearance getting wildly excited.

Hester gave out her voice to its fullest extent.

He jumped round on his music-stool facing her. "Magnificent! superb! you have a tremendous voice. Are you strong?—good constitution? How old—twenty? by twenty?"

He was standing up now, and took Helen by the hand, to the manifest astonishment of Grizel and Mackenzie. "Strong," repeated he: "good robust health. Ah, you have a chest, and a good open mouth: not too English teeth. You have a career before you. Give four years—three;—stop! what do I say? Let me hear your school." He turned again to the piano. "Have you any school?"

Hester divined that he meant where, how, and by whom had she been taught. She replied: "I had finishing lessons from Signor Scugnarelli."

"Dat vagabond!—hum! Sing through this song." He put Alboni's famous 'Libiamo' before her.

Hester acquitted herself fairly well. Razzio crashed the final chords and was silent.

"Well—ah, for a moment, we will speak again of this. Now, mademoiselle," he said, turning to Grizel, "I congratulate you upon your *institutrice*. Return to the scale. *Ut—*"

Once more the melancholy notes of the vocal scale

fell one by one from Grizel's lips as her harsh soprano evoked them. Razzio seemed pre-occupied. His black, brilliant eyes ever and anon turned towards Miss Dalrymple with a strange questioning look.

As soon as the lesson was over and they found themselves once more in the street, Grizel, whose face wore an ill-tempered expression, began to chaff Miss Dalrymple.

"You have made a conquest of the Signor, Miss Dalrymple—it is quite plain. I wonder if there is a Mrs. Razzio? Really, I shall tell mamma how he never took his eyes off you," pursued Grizel, with much more equally refined badinage.

She was vexed that such store should have been set on her governess's voice, and such attention paid to her—put quite in the first place, she told herself, and so she took this method of re-establishing the balance of things. She preferred that Miss Dalrymple should think Razzio's compliments were addressed to her *beaux yeux* rather than to her voice. Hester did not think these remarks were in place, and signified her opinion by a stern silence, which after a time her pupil agreed to understand, and ceased.

Grizel, however, kept her word as to informing her mother, and however distorted an account she contrived to make up and present to Lady Rosston, that watchful and careful matron informed Signor Razzio that she wished the series of lessons to be given at the hotel, and that for the future he must come to Miss Rosston,

instead of her going to his house. The additional expense was enormous, for the master was in great demand. However, before long, he presented himself one morning shivering in furs. Lady Rosston was present, and Hester had in consequence not come down.

"Miladi," observed Razzio, "I want to ask the address of the *institutrice* who accompanied my charming pupil to the lesson the other day. It is of the greatest importance. I have at last discovered the successor of Alboni. Her voice is superb. She should train for opera immediately. She has a grand career before her."

"I thought as much," replied Lady Rosston. "I am pleased to have my opinion confirmed; but I may tell you, Signor Razzio, Miss Dalrymple is absolutely depending upon her own exertions for her living. She could not afford to undertake a course of lessons, or study for the profession of singing."

"I have tried her voice," replied the master, "and have formed the highest estimate of her capacity. It is an unrivalled contralto, and with that she has an intelligent and artistic appreciation."

Condensed and epitomized, such was Razzio's opinion. He said a great deal more, and accompanied his words by lavish gesticulation and grimace. Lady Rosston pondered deeply, fixing her light, greyish-coloured eyes on the swarthy, excited face of the great musician.

Razzio was all that. He had been a famous singer himself, was a composer of nearly first-class merit; and

as a teacher had trained at least a half-dozen *prima donnas*. His name was a household word on the continent. She rang the bell.

“Faites descendre Mamselle Dalrymple.”

Hester walked in presently, and after an inquiring look at her ladyship, bowed pleasantly but distantly to the Signor.

“Signor Razzio is quite raving to me about your voice,” began Lady Rosston. “Do give me a hand-screen; this fire is too hot. Thanks, and—er—I have heard you sing, but I don’t know if you—er—gave it all out.”

“You are too good judge to err, milady,” interpolated Razzio. “I tell you she has a gold mine in her throat. Listen; take your scale;—full, loud, loud notes.”

As he spoke he was accompanying himself with great thunderous chords. His tones, if powerful, had a practised mellowness and richness. The large-volumed harmonious cadences woke an echo in Hester’s soul, and her pulse beat fast and high as she took her place behind the enthusiastic artist, and filling her lungs uttered the notes. She felt grateful to him for his interest, and inclined therefore to justify him. That she did so, a glance at Lady Rosston’s and Grizel’s faces made it apparent.

The latter, finding that her little artifice had broken down, now adopted another *pose*—that of naïve admiration.

“Oh, how splendid!” she cried, affectionately running up to Miss Dalrymple and impetuously throwing her

arms round her neck. "How magnificent! Mamma, is it not magnificent?"

"Well," said Razzio, after politely waiting for the young Mees' raptures to subside; "all I have to say is, if you can give me four years for training, I will guarantee you—guarantee at least three thousand a year. But you must give up everything; you must bind yourself down to sing only what I desire—*absolute-ly*."

"I am grateful to you, Monsieur Razzio," observed Hester, "but you are not aware perhaps that I am absolutely without means to prosecute such a course of studies as you speak of. It is out of the question."

"Pooh, nonsense!" exclaimed he emphatically.

"Milady Rosston, I make the offer to you. I will train her for nothing; after four years she shall pay me what she likes, when she likes. I have found a contralto once more in my life—'*Dat is the question.*'"

He uttered this quotation in English, with a gravity and a pronunciation that made even his listener smile.

Lady Rosston opened her eyes wide. "I really think your offer must be accepted; it would be madness not to. Miss Dalrymple, it would be quite flying in the face of Providence to hesitate."

Hester was standing with downcast head reflecting that her available resources, strained to the utmost, would not suffice to maintain her in Paris for more than two years. Lady Rosston was speaking with genuine disinterestedness, and she put out of sight



the fact that Hester, as a governess, suited her to perfection.

She had absolute confidence in her prudence and good-principle. Miss Bonesmith was prudent enough, but she shirked and scamped her work, and was self-indulgent and troublesome. Miss Dalrymple would have been perfection, if she were ten or more years older: whom could she find to replace her?

"How am I to live in the mean time?" said Hester abruptly, breaking in upon Lady Rosston's meditations. Grizel was singing, and only that he frowned tremendously as he played her *obbligato*, Razzio might have been a wooden semblance of a man.

Lady Rosston started a little, then shrugged her shoulders gently to intimate to Miss Dalrymple that more sordid personal considerations were not to be intruded upon her distinguished self. Hester sighed deeply, and drooped her head with a melancholy that reflected but too faithfully her own mental state. Lady Rosston noted her disappointed, troubled face, and was touched. A governess's life, even within the precincts of her own elect and noble circle, was, if privileged and enviable, precarious. Money in her mind—she was thirty-nine years of age, and was wise for her years—was really the same thing as rank. People had tacitly agreed to hold it otherwise, but the fact remained. Three thousand a year, Razzio said Miss Dalrymple might make. He guaranteed it. He could have no motive in talking nonsense, although Grizel's silly

chatter had made her fear—together groundlessly she acknowledged—a flirtation.

She turned suddenly to Hester.

"You could teach English, you know; I fancy I could recommend you in Paris. My sister-in-law, Madame de Treilles la Tour, is quite a personage here—knows everybody, you know—er—I am interested in your success: what do you say?"

A sigh of relief escaped Hester. "Oh! Lady Rosston, how thoughtful of you!" she exclaimed: but in a low uncertain voice: "Could I? I have a little money certainly; it would help, but it would not suffice."

"You are not without friends," said Lady Rosston, who had risen from her seat, in an oracular tone, laying her hands on Miss Dalrymple's shoulder lightly but impressively.

She left the room then, and Hester remained listening to Grizel's lesson, and revolving in her own mind as clearly as she could for the noise, this recent development of events. Razzio's offer amazed her tremendously. Three—four—five years for nothing. To take as much trouble with her as he was doing now with Miss Rosston, and for nothing—for a chance—a remote chance.

She took a good look at her benefactor, whose countenance at the present moment wore anything but a prepossessing expression. Intense weariness and impatience, mingled with a considerable share of anger, sat on his candid, bald forehead and looked out of

his brilliant southern eyes, and before long he exploded.

“Or-r-r-ements! Mees!” he almost barked. “Again, again—*fa ! se !*”

Not until he was scrambling into the great furred coat and gloves did he look at Miss Dalrymple again. Then he said: “I hope to hear from you, Mees; I have made you a solid offer, *bonâ fide*. Consider—take two, three days, and decide. I make you my compliments,—adieu.” A sweeping bow included both ladies, and he was gone.

A week later saw Hester preparing in earnest to accept the great Razzio’s offer. Lady Rosston had advertised in the *Times* for a successor, and had deputed to Miss Boldene the—to that lady—delightful task of engaging a suitable person out of the five hundred and odd applicants who replied to the advertisement. Miss Boldene knew what was wanted, and succeeded ere long, but with that we have nothing to do.

Lady Rosston carried Hester to see her sister-in-law, the Vicomtesse de Treilles la Tour.

“She will be a friend to you, and a reference in Paris,” she said, as they drove towards the Champs Elysées.

The carriage stopped before a superb house in one of the most fashionable streets of that fashionable quarter. The Rosstons’ mansion in Curzon Street was handsome, and its appointments, even in the May Fair district, remarkable, and Hester had seen some other

mansions of great people at intervals; but this Parisian 'hôtel' de Treilles surpassed them all. Not in size so much as in decoration. The hall and staircases, carpeted with the richest Indian stuffs, were massed with exotics; white statues shone among feathery bamboos and graceful palms; scarlet and white blossoms glowed in the soft light of hanging lamps. Countless servants in magnificent full-dress liveries moved about noiselessly. An English *major-domo* in plain black met them in the lobby, and ushered them through several beautiful rooms into an inner apartment—the especial sanctum of the Vicomtesse.

"I always feel semi-barbarous after this," murmured Lady Rosston, sinking into a chair, a London-made marvel of luxuriousness. "Those pale blue walls are so becoming."

The walls of the room were of quilted blue satin, with painted medallions after Watteau and Boucher let in. Everything else harmonized. One of the fashionable painters of the day had designed the colouring of the room.

"He had a great fortune with his first wife, and doubled it on the Bourse. She was in trade. My sister-in-law is the second Vicomtesse, and she was dowered by a god-mother. She is twenty years younger than he. Try and make friends with her. The trouble is she is artistic just now rather than musical."

The door, invisibly contrived amongst the blue satin

hangings, opened now to give admission to the Vicomtesse. Hester's heart misgave her at the thought of making a friend of the *grande dame*, who was extending, on Lady Rosston's invitation, the tips of her white jewelled fingers towards her.

The Vicomtesse, who was a little over twenty-eight, was "made up" palpably as to complexion, but much more artistically and less conspicuously than her noble kinswoman. Her rather faded blonde hair was dressed at the top of her head. Her dress was of the very richest material, and simplest *confection*. She kissed Lady Rosston cordially but very carefully on both cheeks.

"And so," she said, speaking with a very French accent, "this is the *prima donna* of the future? Sharmed to mek yore aicquaintance, and—er—Lilian—how and where is George?—and why hav you not braight me my nieces? What a singing face you have! Lilian! Miss Dalrymple has the very expression of singing stamped on her physiognomy. Is it not?"

Hester had an eye for an absurdity, and thought of Grizel's "expression of singing," as she had witnessed it that very morning—her mouth wide open, and her long teeth all shown to any but the best advantage; she controlled an inclination to laugh out.

"I certainly shall make Victorien—Monsieur Flasque"—she corrected herself—"paint her for the next Salon," the Vicomtesse continued, examining Miss Dalrymple critically, with her head on one side.

"She is too young, Guinever, dear," observed Lady



Rosston, with a *sous entendu* in her words "You know she is to lie *perdue* for some years to come. Her voice is superb, but totally untaught. Razzio tells me four years at least will be necessary of incessant study. During all that time she is to sing nothing save as he allows. I hope you will follow his directions implicitly, Miss Dalrymple."

Hester's cheeks, which had flamed scarlet under the Vicomtesse's looks and remarks, had now somewhat resumed their usual colour.

"Yes," she answered; "I don't think there is any probability of my being idle."

"What do your Russians think of the plan I suggested?" inquired Lady Rosston.

"A—o—h! The meetings with Miss Dalrymple," replied the Vicomtesse. "You see Princess Gavonzoff really never knows her own mind for two days. I shall just tell her that she has decided, and the thing is done."

"Very well, and don't you think you could talk to the Sagranns? The Marquise is quite *toquée*, is she not, with English ways?"

"She always was Anglophobe, ever since I have known her," replied the Vicomtesse de Treilles, beginning to turn her diamond rings, and allowing the visible and outward sign of a state of burden to expand the muscles of her painted mouth.

Lady Rosston saw this at a glance, and taking out her watch, exclaimed: "Half-past four, Miss Dalrymple. Will you take the carriage home, and tell them to go

when you have done with them to the Cercle Hippique for my lord? I promised to send for him at five."

"Good-bye, Miss Dalrymple," said the Vicomtesse, rising and speaking with a friendly and cordial tone. "Now mind you come over here, and let me know how you get on. I am to hear you sing yet; that is a great treat, they tell me; and now count on me to do all I can to—er—make your stay in Paris agreeable to you."

She looked very gracious, very elegant, almost beautiful, as she stood radiant in her Worth toilette. A soft, beautiful tone of greyish blue, which seemed to harmonize with, and dominate at the same time, the colour of the room; a diamond glistened at her throat, and from her ears the changing reflections of two splendid brilliants displayed themselves. Hester, in her sombre suit of crape, looked like some one from a world apart. She felt possessed by very gloomy forebodings, as she took her leave of the fascinating Vicomtesse. How dared she hope for anything from one so far removed from herself? How could it be expected that she would concern herself for a poor struggling student? Then she reproved herself for her distrust and doubts, remembering with gratitude how great things had been done for her; how the rough ways had been made plain; how the wind had been tempered for her. She was naturally sanguine, and temperament and religion combined to make her throw off her fear and face boldly the unknown solitary life that lay so

near before her. She had little to lose in changing her mode of existence. A visiting governess' life has rather the advantage over that of a resident, inasmuch as it leaves a certain portion of the day free. Nor could she feel any keen regrets to leave the Rosston family. Grizel's affectations were soul-wearying in the extreme; and Helen, although she felt a genuine affection for her governess, and was in her way lovable enough, vented her ill-temper and discontent in *aigre-douce* speeches, which fell to Miss Dalrymple's lot as often as to that of any one else. Helen was to be pitied, and she herself felt this keenest of all. When Miss Boldene, or others like her, changed the tone of idiotic fulsome flattery with which she habitually addressed Miss Rosston for that of sympathizing condolence which they deemed her plainness and delicacy warranted, her eyes would kindle and sparkle with a not too amiable light, and her voice become sharper and drier. She snubbed Miss Boldene unmercifully, but that deserving person turned cheek after cheek to the smiter with unfailing acquiescence and imperturbable insensibility, so that Helen's spitefulness sought a more satisfactory victim, and notwithstanding her respect and almost love of Miss Dalrymple, she could not hinder herself from inserting a few pins into her tender parts.

Hester's youth was against her. Ten years would have added a pachydermatous layer to her skin, and Helen's jeers and flouts would have glanced off pointless and blunt. She could not help flushing, nor could

she keep a contemptuous light from shining in her eyes. She exercised an eternal and most wearisome self-restraint: every word, look, and gesture was studied and controlled; it was only at night, when she closed the door of her own room, that she could breathe freely. An older hand or more skilled practitioner would have taken things more calmly, less zealously. Hester never relaxed herself for an instant, and the strain was almost unendurable.

She found lodgings easily enough: two tiny attics in a house occupied by tradespeople, situate in a street not too far from the residence of Razzio. A piano was placed in one—the sitting-room; it held just three chairs, covered with what had once been green velvet; a sort of sofa, the internal economy of which was a sadly prominent feature; some frightful old fly-blown prints, and a carpet with plenty of holes. Grizel and Helen, both of whom had elected to be delighted and charmed with everything, paused at the sight of the carpet. Helen told her father about it, and he good-naturedly desired her to make Miss Dalrymple a present of a comfortable one, as a parting gift. Helen imparted this intelligence to her mother and Grizel, and the upshot of it was that a thick Turkey rug was sent, which supplemented very comfortably the deficiencies of the tattered one.

Housekeeping in this fashion was a novelty to Hester, and the work of installation kept her busy

enough for a while. The Vicomtesse found her some pupils, and until fashionable Paris went out of town she did well enough; the lessons were well remunerated, but beginning so late in the season, could not of course be expected to last long. *La saison morte*, in all its rigour, was to be faced yet, and as the tuitions dropped off, Hester's anxieties once more beset her. To live in Paris costs a great deal, especially to one knowing nothing of its ways. She took her meals at restaurants, of which establishments she visited daily a fresh one, in the hope of finding economical entertainment. Her piano, which she was obliged to hire and to keep in good order, was also an expense. Do what she would the cost of mere existence in Paris was infinitely beyond what she had calculated. By the end of June not one of her *clientèle* of pupils remained in Paris; July dragged along, wearisome, hot, and solitary.

It was August now, and Hester had inhabited her attics for over four months. The Rosstons had left early in the month of April. They were now in Scotland. Helen had written to her at times, and begged her to write and give them all her news. The correspondence had gradually waned away; Hester's last letter had remained unanswered. Mrs. Greville wrote, at long intervals; she had a husband, children, and a parish to look after. The Vicomtesse de Treilles la Tour was at Royat, in the *Auvergnat*, and in September was to join her brother for the partridge festival. Razzio was disporting himself at Dieppe, and from that was



to run over to Margate, to meet Dapplesome of the Royal Italian Opera, and consult about a tenor who was to be forced or manufactured somehow for the next season. The Pasteur Vrillas and his family were visiting their relations in Vevay. There was not a soul in all the great city of Paris to whom Hester could address one word.

It was fearfully hot. The sun beat down on the slates, and made her hideous little sitting-room feel like an oven. The very keyboard of the piano was hot. She had risen early, while yet the day was fresh and cool, and had sung for her allotted time; Razzio had been obliged to curtail her practising. She was fatiguing her voice; at one time, between east wind and over-practice, she had brought on a slight congestion of the vocal cords. Four hours a day of "intelligent study," as Razzio styled it, was to suffice. She had been able, thanks to the recommendations of the Vicomtesse, to supply her necessities by teaching English; but she had no pupils now. Everybody was gone to "Les Eaux" somewhere or other, and in all the crowd in Paris Hester knew not one face. She sat in her window for a little air; but the hot sun was reflected back from the slates, and thrown in her face. Not twenty feet away, at the side, a great factory chimney rose up: a hot steam seemed to come out of its bricks; a kind of drowsy burring sound filled the air from the machines. Hester hated this chimney with a kind of personal hate. It was always there: always hot and smoking. A great

bell, belonging to the factory which owned it, woke her faithfully every morning at six as it summoned the workpeople, and annoyed her in the evening when it signalled their dismissal. It was exhaustingly hot. She went into her bed-room, but there seemed to be even less air in it; so she determined to go out; put on her hat and gloves, locked her door, and carried the key down-stairs with her.

The house was a large one. Innumerable doors with brass plates were on each lobby. Several were open, inviting the air—not too fresh or plentiful—of the staircase. The buzz of voices, the measured click-click of sewing-machines, came out of some of the doors; a dry, feverish feeling seemed all about. Hester thought she never would reach the Concierge's lodge.

She did at last, and the hot scorching streets were before her now to choose from—with the prospect of climbing up all the weary stairs when she returned. The streets were full as usual. Dressmakers' *employées*—it was the season of tourists and travelling Americans—were running, or rather crawling errands. *Char-à-bancs* of Cook's tourists were scuffling along, the travellers all jaded and bewildered-looking, yet staring as if for dear life. Cool drinks were in great request at the *cafés*; iced gazeuse and sticky syrups loaded all the little marble tables on the Boulevards. The leaves on the chestnut-trees were dying as fast as they could, and dropping in the still air straight to earth as if glad to

get there and be at rest. The heat of the pavement struck through her boots, and the August sun filled the clear atmosphere with a dazzling yellow glare that was blinding.

The Luxembourg was her nearest and most usual resort for a walk. A shady seat well-known to her, on the side of the fountain, where she could turn her back to the sun, invited her; she had a book in her pocket with which to occupy herself, some knitting in case it were too hot to read, and a fan if neither were practicable. On wet afternoons the Louvre provided her with exercise and recreation, if a solitary and silent promenade through the galleries be accounted such.

The Places, hot and dusty, were all at last crossed: the rows of monstrous white houses all as like as peas were fatiguing to look at. Hester kept in the shade as much as possible: her large parasol guaranteed her from sun-stroke at least; and it was with a feeling of thankfulness that she found herself in the garden of the Luxembourg. Her feet were burning, and her thin dress felt terribly heavy. It was hot enough; but the grass and leaves were green, the trees had not the scorched look of those of the Boulevards, and the ceaseless plash and trickle of the fountains was agreeable after the rattle of the omnibuses; so was the chirping of the tame sparrows. She had brought a bit of bread, and seating herself crumbled it up. One by one her feathered customers fluttered out from their shelters in the leaves and snapped their morsels from her: then off, disdaining

to remain one instant longer than sufficed to satisfy their wants.

There were a good many people in the Luxembourg. Hester, looking round, recognized some *habitues* of the place—women, evidently shop-keepers' wives, with their children—spindle-legged, yellow-faced boys, and little girls dressed like miniature fashion-plates. These were always noisy and tiresome, but to day the heat seemed to have overcome their spirits, and they lounged about peevishly. It was too hot to read, and her needles seemed to grow too hot to take up the stitches properly, so she leaned back in her seat, and abandoned herself perforce to her meditations. These indeed ran rather in a groove of late, as is the way with solitary people, especially when they are not voluntarily so.

“Four years! How in the world can I hope to carry it out? The only comfort I have is—unless Signor Razzio is too good-natured to me—my voice is making progress. But I am now spending my capital. It is terrible; and the Vicomtesse may forget me altogether, when she comes back in December: most likely will, especially as Razzio has forbidden me to sing for her. ‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’” She ended her gloomy thoughts, exorcising and driving them out with the text.

“Tra-la-la—tra-la-la!” sang a voice quite low and sweetly: “la-la-lira-la.”

Hester started and looked round. The voice belonged to a young woman who had just seated herself on the end of the bench. She was very plainly dressed, but

her clothes were distinctively French, and were worn as a Parisian wears hers. Her face was clear-skinned, but freckled; her hair was a reddish brown, thick and curly; and she had bright, brown, honest-looking eyes. Hester had seen her before several times, and fancied, without having any reason to do so beyond the fact of meeting her continually in the street where Razzio lived, that she also was a student. She was pleasant-looking and bright; she pulled a little case out of her pocket, and began to crochet, but presently she dropped both hands into her lap and drew and exhaled a heavy sigh.

"It is just too hot for anything," she said, half to the stranger at the end of the seat, and half to herself. The voice was just American enough to be recognized as such, and the confidence was volunteered in such a manner that acceptance or rejection seemed indifferent.

"Yes," Hester remarked, "I think this is the worst day we have had yet."

"It must end in a thunderstorm," continued the strange girl; "wish it would hurry up and come along, but I see no signs of it around—do you?"

"No!" sighed Hester. "Perhaps it is not hot enough yet; and then for a moment there was a silence broken only by the click of their fans."

"Tra-la-la; tra-la-lira la—la!" sang the stranger, this time a little louder. "I *do* feel so glad to-day that I have to sing," she said apologetically. "You sing, I know—have seen you coming out of Razzio's. I wish I could afford Razzio; but I can't. Is he very costly?"



You're training for opera, I suppose, else you'd hardly be with him. How pleased I am that I've only six months more to do here. We Americans are so fond of Paris. I can tell you I hate it; I'm just dying to see the back of it, I am."

"I hate it too," assented Hester, almost cordially; the strange girl attracted her, and she half turned round on the seat so as to face her. "I am so lonely. I have plenty to do, but every one is out of town, and it is not nice to be by oneself."

"Yes, I know you're by yourself: I know where you live. I saw you go into the house one day. I was talking to my Signora in the street and you passed. She told me you were a great contralto, a pupil of Razzio. I thought you did not look much of a theatrical. I know their looks pretty well by this."

"Have you been long in Paris?" queried Hester.

"Three years and I have to give one in Milan and then I am done praise the Fates!" replied she, all in one breath; "and then I start for home. Just won't I be glad to see Beacon Street once more!"

"Are you studying for opera?"

"No," answered the strange girl abruptly, "no. I should like to well enough, but my family won't allow me. I've got a mezzo-soprano, and if my health only stands the cold at home, I expect to make a good thing of it at concerts, oratorios, and such. I'm promised a church, and that's five hundred dollars a year right off."

"I mean to go in for that sort of thing too—oratorios and concerts, if I can get them."

"You'll get them; no fear: though London is a hard place to get on in. So crowded, you know. But perhaps your friends will put you through—at all events, with your contralto—"

"Oh! don't talk of my contralto, please. I am anything but content with it. I think anything else is more useful."

"Well!" remarked the Bostonian, "I'm contented with my own: a mezzo-soprano is a useful kind of dollar-machine where I am going to. I was glad I found you on this bench to-day, because then I could let off my little *roulade*. I'd got to do it; and once before I had a pleasant letter from home, and felt like singing, and just exactly at this spot I chirped a bit scarcely over my breath, and what *do* you think?—a horrid man, that I never dreamed was within cry of me, sidled out from below those bushes:

"*'C'est toi! Enfin! charmante oiseau que je cherche si longtemps.'*"

She mimicked the voice and accent of the marauder, hunching up her shoulders, and grimacing her piquant freckled countenance. Hester laughed outright.

"What did you do?"

"Sat like a dumb thing, and began to talk on my fingers with my eyes and mouth wide open, and after five minutes or less he cleared out stupefied. It's the best way, I find," she added reflectively. "I used to

say, '*Ich bin Deutsche—ich verstehe kein Franzosisch*'; but once it happened the animal was German, or spoke that language, and then I was regularly up a tree."

"One of these days you may meet a dumb mute," suggested Hester.

"Then I should have a fit. After all, they are always amusing; not that one dares laugh."

"No," assented Hester; "especially if you are acting the *rôle* of a deaf and dumb person."

"How sharp you are—must have been brought up on pickles. How do you do when you are annoyed by the *gommeux*? You are, of course," she added, with a critical look at Hester's face and figure.

"Take no notice whatever."

"Ah! *you* can do the statuesque—I can't. Any *rôle* but a passive *rôle* for me. I've *got* to do or say something. I could no more pose as the frozen Diana than a kitten could help playing with a cork. Where do you live? I'm in the Rue Rennequien, Pension Raclou."

"Pension!" echoed Hester. "I am in lodgings all by myself."

"I envy you. No company is better than bad, and that's what it is at my pension. They are a very detestable lot; never done complaining of my singing and my piano. The Raclous have no notion of giving me my walking ticket though. The bill is too regularly paid for that. Besides, they get references to the minister and the bankers. The last, the only one *they* care a fig for, you can bet. They are quite respectable

themselves, but they take in any trash that arrives with luggage. The last two women that came laid a complaint, in the *bureau*, of my making the faintest little squeak on the stairs. It is *my* idiosyncrasy to sing—just as it is theirs to whitewash their faces and wear several coloured hairs on their heads.”

“Why do you stay?”

“Oh! I expect I’ve got to,” answered the American, airily. “My uncle and aunt were good enough to bring me over. They are very rich, and they come here pretty near every year. They settled me there, and the place is all right; only I feel all the time I am practising, that some one is objecting to the noise. I assure you, I don’t believe my voice comes out half what it might if it were in a different atmosphere. It discourages me too, you see, to have people objecting to what I intend them all to pay for one of these days. However, I just worry along and keep don’t caring. How did *you* come to settle in lodgings?”

Hester explained that she had never heard of such a thing as a boarding-house or a pension; and that a convent had occurred to her as the only alternative.

“A convent is not half bad, I can tell you. I had a friend who entered one—in Boston. I often went to see her. But, I say, it is after six; I must be off. What is your way?—if you are going home, we may as well walk together?”

They rose and left the Gardens, taking their way homewards through the sultry streets. Hester was

a head and shoulders taller than her companion, who was a sparely built, but wiry little figure, rather broad-shouldered for her height. She told Hester what little remained to be related of her history. Her father had been in business and failed. Rich relations were defraying the expense of her musical education. Her mother was alive, and she had several sisters and brothers. She asked Hester innumerable questions, and seldom waited to hear the answer. She seemed friendly and good-natured, and was decidedly amusing. Hester felt growing brighter, and, as it were, younger, every moment. She felt for the nonce as she used to be a year ago—light-hearted almost, and young.

"Well," drawled the stranger, "good-bye. I say, I'd like to meet you again, if you don't object. Most every one I know is away, and it's the same with you—you say."

"I should very much like to meet you," responded Hester, speaking impulsively. "I have absolutely no one here; and it is awfully dreary."

"All right then; but," responded the American, after a discursive glance at Hester's crape, "I can assure you I shall enjoy a dinner eaten in peace and quiet. You ought to hear them at Raclou's when that feast comes off. I guess it's like a steam factory full ding, and just now it's worst of all—the tourists have come. Babel was a penny whistle to it. And yet, one and all, they complain of my practising."

Hester laughed. "I don't believe any one hears me



here, unless the cats or sparrows on the roof—if any ever go so high. The house is full of sewing-machines.”

“What is your name, please?” asked the stranger, taking out a little pocket-book and pencil. “Mine is Leroy—Delicia Everett Leroy—10024, Rue Rennequien.”

“Hester Dalrymple, is mine,” replied Hester. “And I live at the very top of the house.”

“Well, I must go. Good-night. I’ll look round to-morrow, when I get clear.”

Hester mounted the stairs so quickly, that she found herself at the top almost without feeling it, and was not conscious of being extremely tired as well as out of breath. Her chance encounter had revived her, body and soul. She felt more courage to face her future—less the oppression. Its gloom and uncertainty had been lifted from her for the nonce. She was in no way volatile or over-sanguine; neither was she pessimistic or inclined to despondency. Her solitude and anxieties together were an over-heavy burden, and she had got her apprenticeship to serve before she could fit her neck to the yoke.

She sat down once more in her window-seat. The August evening was beginning to close in. It was past seven, and far across the roofs and chimneys the sun was setting in a fiery red blaze; a hot mist began to gather as fast as the light faded, and the sounds of nocturnal Paris came up from the street below. Hester forgot most things. Looking out at the red sunset, and

thinking of last August, this very time, she and her uncle and aunt had watched just such a sunset from the hotel windows at Cromer: only, instead of setting above a wilderness of chimney-pots as now, the sun sank in all its cloudless splendour into the purple and azure of the German Ocean.

Poor Hester!—instead of the hot, dust-laden August air of Paris, as she breathed it from her attic, she scented again the fresh nipping breeze of the sea; instead of the noisy din of the street, the rhythmic murmur of the little waves breaking on the beach, and the faint intermittent echo of a stringed band in the distance. In spite of herself she cried bitterly.

After a while she recovered herself, and reminded by a sensation of weakness and exhaustion that she had eaten nothing since mid-day, opened her cupboard. It did not present much. One pear and an end of a crusty roll lay side by side on a plate.

“Only for my voice I would do with that,” she said to herself. “But I shall be unfit for my practice in the morning if I don’t eat something better now.”

As with all professional singers, diet was a serious consideration with Hester. “Eggs lightly cooked, milk, good meat, simply-cooked green vegetables, fresh butter; nothing very hot; nothing very cold.” Such were Razzio’s instructions. So long as her readings with the Russian Princess had lasted, and the lessons with the Sagrannes children, for both of which she was handsomely remunerated, she had followed his in-

structions, and had enjoyed a sufficiency of food; but of late she had cut down her expenses to a figure which was as near starvation point as she dared to make it. She used to buy a glass of milk in a *laiterie* or milk-shop; a brown roll and butter sufficed for breakfast. She allowed herself a plate of meat every second day in a Duval restaurant; on alternate days an egg was made to suffice, with a cup of *café au lait*. She had made a rigorous calculation, and had apportioned her money in such a manner as to spend as little as possible during the "dead season." As soon as Madame de Treilles returned to town she might hope for some more lessons, and then she would allow herself a better dietary. Razzio would be in town also, and the lessons and severe practice would be resumed.

The piece of roll was as dry as sawdust. Hester put on her hat and descended once more the weary stone stairs. The operatives who occupied the next floor had all gone home; the Concierge's wife was sweeping out the rooms. The door was open, and a horrible odour of machine oil, of cloth, and many more unpleasantnesses came out.

"Bon soir, M'zelle," said the woman, who was emptying a small panful of dust and shreds into a large receptacle at the door. She was an ill-tempered, rapacious woman; but she had a certain respect for the English "Mees" in the *mansarde*, who gave no trouble and was of a *conduite irréprochable*.

"Do you think," inquired Hester, "that I am too late for the dinner at Duval's?"

"I think so; it is nearly eight," replied the woman, looking at her with a little surprise, for the financial position of the student of singing was known very well not to be exactly brilliant. "But," she added, "there is the *Lapin en Fiche* a few steps further on."

"Is it cheap?" asked Hester.

The Concierge's wife took a good look at Hester, then laid down her pan and brush, and put her arms akimbo.

"*Voyons!*" said she. "Why not have a little spirit stove in your room, and cook your food? it is not becoming for you, and it costs dear, to frequent restaurants."

"A spirit stove!" echoed Hester.

"Wait till I finish here, and I will show you mine in the Concierge's lodge."

She turned to the *atelier*, whisked and dusted, shut down the windows and locked them, locked the door, and accompanied Hester downstairs.

The Concierge's lodge was not too appetizing to look at. The Concierge spent his days sitting motionless at one end of a fishing-rod which was thus anchored on the *quai* of his predilection. His wife, having all his work to do as well as her own, could not spare much time for the family domicile, which, if frowzy, was not without some signs of comfort and homeliness. A canary's cage hung in the window; a huge red cat snored in the sill below it, beside some pots of carnations in full bloom. There was an easy-chair and newspapers and footstools.

"*Vlà!*" said the Concierge's wife, lifting up a stove which was made in the usual way; "light this," indi-

cating the wick,—“then a kettle boils here, or this saucepan; it is quite a kitchen.”

“Where do you buy one?” asked Hester.

“Um! it costs dear. This is English, but I can hire you one, smaller. See,”—she took a smaller one from some receptacle,—“I will clean that, and you shall pay me—oh, not much, the first of every month, you know, with the rent.”

“Thank you, Madame Desclefs; if you will kindly give it to me I will carry it upstairs when I return.” So saying, Hester let herself out into the street.

“*Le Lapin en Fiche*,” cried the Concierge’s wife after her. She nodded by way of acknowledgment, and took her way down the street.

The lamps were all lighting now, though it was still twilight. People were hurrying towards a theatre which was on the boulevard close at hand; cabs rattled along; the inevitable British tourist stared and strolled. The *Lapin en Fiche* was not far to seek, and Hester secured a quiet corner, and ordered some meat.

A mutton cutlet was brought, and some haricot beans, these last greasy and sweetened. But she was too hungry to mind, and speedily made an end of the viands. The *addition* came to two francs and some centimes.

“One and eightpence and something over,” reflected she, as she finished her bread; “but if I can manage the spirit lamp I shall really save something.”

The next morning saw her on her way to the Halles



Centrales, in company with Madame Desclefs, who showed her how to deal with the viragoes who ruled the vegetable and fish *halles*, and what description of flesh, fowl, and fish was most likely to suit her new cuisine.

Hester enjoyed it. The great rows of fruit and vegetable stalls, all piled with the rich-coloured produce of the wealthiest month of the year, the perfume of nectars and pines, the rich hues of Montreil peaches and tomatoes, the green almonds and grapes from Southern France, made a picture that delighted her eyes and nose. Her ears were not so well off, for the presiding furies were agitated about some matter or other, and bad language was flying from end to end of the rows of stalls. One woman in particular, who had arranged her display of fruit and garden stuff with an eye to artistic effect that a painter might have envied, was emitting a series of verbal fireworks which actually drew forth a protest from the Concierge's wife.

"It is atrocious, really; that Fargotte is misbehaving to excess this morning."

"When you want anything very uncommon it is here you can come," she said, stopping at a corner stall. "You will recollect it. I am acquainted with Madame Fricot. B'jour!" she said, in reply to a nod from the owner, who was shelling peas into a basket. "But I never buy *in* the Halles; come, and you will see."

She led the way out of the great market, and showed

Hester a number of poor women of a class analogous to the London hawker, who crouched about the outer wall of the Halles, with baskets, stalls, and barrows full of vegetables and fruit. The price of their commodities, she explained, was far lower than within, and she proceeded to chaffer and haggle until she had filled her basket with materials for a *pot-au-feu*. Hester bought green onions and other high-flavoured comestibles under Madame Desclefs' direction; then to the butcher's, where she learned the proper sorts of meat to cook in a spirit-lamp, and the proper quantity for one day's or two days' supply. She entered into the spirit of this new enterprise with the delight of a child, which was, however, a little checked when the Concierge's wife asked if she knew how to cook her marketing when she got it home. On receiving a reply in the negative, she volunteered to allow her to look on while she prepared her own dinner. Hester gladly accepted the offer, and, under Madame Desclefs' supervision, peeled and cut up a quantity of green onions, celery, and ever so many odoriferous green things whose existence until now had never been suspected by her; prepared the meat, lighted the lamp, and set it all to cook itself in readiness for the return of the sporting Concierge, whose contribution to the family resources was usually one gudgeon in two months.

She repeated the process with her own marketing when she went upstairs, and sat down very contentedly to practise until the contents of the stew-pan should be

ready. She had sung for nearly an hour almost without intermission, when a shrill voice startled her :

"What *are* you doing, and what *is* the smell?"

It was Miss Leroy of course. She had tapped at the door in vain, and now stood waiting to be asked in, her bright countenance inclined forwards and her nose expanded inquiringly.

"You see," she said, advancing into the room, "I am early. I said I'd come for you in the afternoon, but I felt dull, and thought I would just run round. How are you to-day? But first of all, for goodness' sake, tell me what is in that pot."

"My dinner," answered Hester, "that is to be, if it behaves itself and cooks properly."

"I know how to cook," observed the American, seating herself and looking critically at the pot. "That is a despatcher, neither more nor less. I guess I've seen better ones, but you could live by the help of that right well."

"I intend to," said Hester; "but I am timid about experiments. The Concierge's wife has been very good to me to-day. I have really been in luck to-day and yesterday," she added, parenthetically. "She took me out, showed me where and how to buy food, and then how to cook it."

"That *was* kind. And what happened to you yesterday?"

"I met you," answered Hester quite simply, and looking at the American with her beautiful truthful eyes.

Miss Leroy was silent a minute, and then said "H'm" deliberately. "I came to ask you to come over to supper with me to-night, just to see if you like our caravanserai. It is supper, though Raclou calls it dinner to please the English tourists. Then after supper I will walk home with you. I want to buy a dress this afternoon. My remittance arrived this morning. Will you come with me to the *Bon Marché*, and perhaps some other places?"

"Yes, with pleasure, everything you have asked, on one condition, which you will perhaps be afraid of: that you share the contents of the pot first of all. It will be ready in half an hour."

"Delighted! And would you mind letting me hear your voice? It is against Razzio's rules, I know; but I promise never to say a word about it."

Hester sang a song or two, and then some of her most difficult study pieces.

"Well," ejaculated Miss Leroy, "I am enchanted. If you have only had six months you've done wonders, I guess. It's a pure contralto. What's your upper register?"

"*Sol—la—sc—ut,*" sang Hester for reply.

"*Ut—re—mi—do—sol,*" added the other, taking her own top notes up where Hester left off. Then she sang down the scale to her lowest note, and Hester took up hers in like manner, and sang down to her deepest notes. Each felt the keenest delight in this performance.

"Just what I have above you can take below. No;

you can go lower. Brava! brava! It is as full as Albani's. You are a lucky woman, Miss Dalrymple. If you don't come to grief you will drive in a carriage and pair, while poor me, with my screed of mezzo-soprano, will be lucky if I can afford an omnibus."

Before long the *pot-au-feu* was ready to eat, and Hester and her friend made a picnic of its contents, which, to give the Concierge's wife her due, were uncommonly good. Delicia Leroy pronounced it to be rather better than pot pie, a Transatlantic dainty of which she preserved an affectionate remembrance.

"To tell you the truth, the meals at Raclou's are inclined to be sketchy sometimes; it is only when she has her winter lot, the regular boarders, that it is at all solid. As for the tourists, the queerer the messes the better they like 'em. They've got something to talk about then. They never stop longer than a couple of days, so she doesn't care a red cent for them."

"Where do these tourists come from—England, or over the ocean?" asked Hester.

"I don't know; how should I? When the females wear mob caps to dinner they're English, when they don't they're not. Generally one picks out the Anglaises by their way of thatching their heads with white muslin; I assure you it's just one and the same as the Union Jack.

"I say," continued the voluble Delicia, "it is not nearly so warm to-day; hurry up, and let us get off to



buy my frock. You have not got such a thing as a machine, have you?"

"A sewing machine?—not I. Do you mean to say that you can make your dresses?"

Hester gazed at her friend open-eyed.

"I should rather think so," she replied. "Make everything I wear—hats, and all, except my shoes and stockings. How do you imagine for one minute that I could afford to buy them in Paris any more than in Boston?"

"And did you make them in Boston?" hazarded Hester. She began to be filled with a vague wonder at Miss Leroy, and contrasting her own helplessness in these matters with the capacities of that young person, felt sadly humiliated and inferior.

"Of course, everybody does, except very rich folks, and some of them do too. Clothes and labour cost so dear, people have to put to and work for themselves. Can't you?"

Hester shook her head. She was thinking how soon her handsome morning dresses might be expected to grow shabby, and how the hot sun and dust of Paris were conspiring to turn her light dresses a rusty brown. How were they to be replaced?

"Well, you know how to cook?" asserted her visitor, nodding at the table.

"Madame Desclefs showed me how to make that, otherwise I could not."

"Stars!" ejaculated Miss Leroy. "Well, I can put you up to a trick or two in that line; and, I say, let's be

off—do. I want to go shopping; I do love it. Should you like to fix over your gowns? If that crape skirt was turned upside down now that you've got on, it would improve you and it. I'll show you how, if you like."

"If I like?" asked Hester. "I could not like anything better."

They were descending the great stairs now, and ere long found themselves at the porter's lodge.

"Well," asked Madame Desclefs, good-humouredly, "how did your cooking turn out?"

"Very good—very good indeed; and I am much obliged to you."

"I will send up spirit for the lamp," she added, as she closed the door. She did, and charged Hester half as much more than she would have paid for it in a shop. She was not evil-natured, but it is hard to make a living in Paris, especially with a husband who confines his exertions to the pursuit, or rather, to be accurate, to the imitation of Seine gudgeons. Hester did not know it, and if she did, would have thought the civil attentions and interest of the Concierge's wife cheap at the money.

## CHAPTER VII.

## CLOUDS GATHERING.

AUGUST burned itself out at last, and September broke its entry in a mellow St. Martin's summer garb. The chestnuts had put out a second crop of leaves, which lived only a few weeks; and the cold, white glitter of the Boulevards was unbroken to the eye. The young swallows were careering above the roofs, practising for their flight to the South. The milliners were busy inventing autumn fashions, and devising shooting costumes. Razzio was back in town. As a natural consequence Hester and Miss Leroy were once more in full training; and the fellow boarders of the last-named were making themselves more tiresome than ever. Hester and she had been inseparable companions during the vacations; it had been no vacation to either of them. Miss Leroy's dress had been made, Hester assisting; and the wardrobe of the last-named had been passed in review by the neat-handed American. An old dress was ripped up to serve as a pattern, and Hester felt competent now to make a wearable garment alone and unaided. If it were no more, the long tasks of stitching and sewing

employed her spare hours—of which she had many—for she was continually exhorted by Razzio not to fatigue her voice. Over practice defeated its own object, he maintained, and robbed the voice of its freshness and limpidity.

She took a walk every day, in general accompanied by Delicia, who, however, objected to long excursions; being, like most of her countrywomen, an indifferent *piéton*.

The Vicomtesse de Treilles La Tour had not yet returned to town. It was a long time since Helen Rosston had written to her. The Russian Princess had gone to St. Petersburg, and thence to her principality in Black Russia. The Duchess de Sagrannes and her children were at their château in the Vosges. Hester now and again strolled past their respective hotels, hoping to discern some trace of life in the windows. Everything was shut up. Sometimes the feeling of uncertainty as to her future oppressed her so keenly that it made itself apparent. Miss Leroy yielded one day to an inclination which had frequently possessed her of late, and asked Hester in her usual blunt way what was the cause of her low spirits.

Hester fixed her grey eyes on the American girl's good-humoured bright countenance, and was silent for a minute.

"Why should I bother you with anxieties, dear?" she asked gently. "You could not help me, and it would be too long and dull a story to tell you."

"If it is money troubles, I could not," replied Delicia frankly. "The money I am spending is not my own; and it is barely enough, even if you wanted it, which you plainly don't. You used to give lessons, you told me."

"The fact of the matter is, I may say, I have nothing to live on but lesson-giving. I have a little money, but I dare not consume it all, and it is going day by day, and nothing coming in. If Madame de Treilles were only back in town!" sighed Hester. Her nightmare was in full possession of her now, and drops of perspiration stood on her forehead.

"My friends are all out of town," commented Miss Leroy—"English lessons are rather a drug in the market here; unless you have protections. And even then, *grandes dames*, as they call them, have but little time to think of such infinitesimal trifles as the like of us."

Hester sighed deeply. They had walked along the Quay as far as the Pont Neuf. The whitish-gray expanse of the river, with its barges and little steamers, seemed almost stagnant between the walls of the quays. It was the middle of October now, and the breeze that followed the Seine in its course was chilly.

"There is a cold snap in that," observed Miss Leroy; "it reminds me of the late fall at home. I say; have you ever been in Paris for the winter?"

"No; we were in Paris for the greater part of the last winter. I did not come to Paris until March."



"March! Well, you know what they can do here in the way of East winds. But a Paris winter is unspeakably cold. It is not so cold, according to the thermometer, as Boston, but it is infinitely harder to bear."

Hester thought of her attics under the slates. "How am I to afford a fire," she mused, "if I don't get some tuition?" Little as she liked doing it, she determined to write to Mrs. Greville. Then she resolved to postpone doing so for another while. Pasteur Vrilas and his wife would be sure to find something for her. They had promised, and people had not yet got back to town. She scolded herself for being despondent, and tried to put her gloomy forebodings out of her head.

"Let us cross over," she said, "and look at Notre Dame. I don't believe I have seen it yet."

"Well, if you have read Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame*, do not go!" observed Miss Leroy. "I've not yet forgiven myself for going to see the Tower of London. Oh! dear, but I was disillusioned."

"Were you?—how?"

"Oh, every way. It was all so small, to begin with. I could not get over that. And the awful old bogy, the beef-eater, gabbled over everything so; and there was an odd-looking woman who would ask questions, and dropped *h's* all round. I could have cried! When they came to Sir Walter Raleigh's cell, she bounced in and then she bounced out. 'Oh, 'ow dark!' she cried.

‘I ’ope they gave the pore gentleman a cannel.’ ‘Well, mum,’ said the beef-eater, ‘I ’opes as ’ow they did!’ And all the time she kept teasing the man to know ‘wen ’e was goin’ to show them were Mary Jane Grey’s ’ed was took off.’ ‘Presently, mum, presently,’ he used to reply. My stars! to hear the English language massacred like that in one of the very sanctuaries of English history too!”

“Hem!” said Hester. “We had better keep silent in this sanctuary of French history, or the very same thing may happen.” They were at the door of the great cathedral now.

“Yes,” observed Miss Leroy, discontentedly, “I’ve seen it before. I don’t call it a patch on St. Paul’s.”

“Oh, how can you?” exclaimed Hester. “Why, this is ever so much older.”

“Yes, I know; a sort of grandmother of churches; but it is all so new-looking. As churches go, St. Paul’s is not old; but it’s grand. I went to service there—once; I could not hear one word the man was saying.”

They soon left, and took their way homewards again. Miss Leroy elected to turn her back on the *quais*, and cross into the Rue de Rivoli, which she pronounced to be more cheerful, and Hester and she abandoned themselves to the fascinations of the shop-fronts.

October waned by degrees, and a bright, cold November warned the two students that the dreaded Paris winter was upon them now. Hester luckily was

provided with warm clothes; her sealskin coat and woollens were promptly requisitioned, and she determined to do without a fire as long as possible. Not a word or sign from Madame de Treilles did she hear. At last, close on Christmas, Hester remarked that the great Hôtel de Treilles began to show signs of life. She inquired one day if the Vicomtesse had returned. Yes, she had returned. She did not venture to ask for an interview. After a week of anxious debate, she called one morning and sent up her card. No; madame was gone for a drive in the Bois. She waited another week, then she wrote a note. No answer was returned to this.

Her despair now became absolute. Miss Leroy, from whom she in vain tried to hide it, felt for her most keenly, and tried to get some American friends to interest themselves to find something for Miss Dalrymple to do.

"It is no use," Hester said one day. "If I go back to London, Mrs. Greville would get me a place. I could go as nursery governess—children's maid; but it is wretched to fail in this way. There is plenty to do here if I could but get at it."

"Have you ever spoken to Razzio?"

"Never said a word to him beyond good-morning. I should be afraid to."

"Well, I shouldn't," replied Miss Leroy with decision. "Your circumstances ought to be made known to Razzio. He's responsible in a way for you."

Hester refused absolutely to speak to Razzio on the

subject, and when Delicia volunteered to undertake the office, forbade her attempting anything of the sort.

Christmas and New Year passed away, and January. Miss Leroy was to leave for Milan in January, and it was now upon them. Each was sorry and depressed, and the weather, which rang the changes from rain to snow, was not enlivening.

Hester had made up her mind to return to London in March. There was no help for it. At her present rate of expenditure her little stock of money would be diminished to twenty pounds. She could easily find a place in London, and determined to take the very first that offered a livelihood, for she dared not wait to choose, seeing her capital at so low an ebb. Her visions of a great and noble career as an artiste waned and faded away. She blamed herself for this disappointment, and told herself that it was a just chastisement for her pride and self-conceit. God had exalted her, and she had not known how to comport herself; she bowed her head to the stroke; and sought in resignation, comfort—chill though it be.

The prospect of so soon losing her sole friend and companion was an almost equally keen stroke of misfortune. Delicia Leroy had accomplished her period of study in Paris, and in accordance with her guardian's wishes was to finish at Milan, and take six months' tuition from a celebrated master there. Hester saw the date of her departure approach nearer and nearer, and with a grief which she could not disguise. The

bright, cheery companion who had aided her to bear the privations and misery of the winter; who had lightened the anxieties of her uncertain and wretchedly false position; the one ray of brightness in all this gloom, was now to be withdrawn from her, and almost reconciled her to her own disappointment. Six weeks now of Paris was all she would have to endure. She would make an end of everything, and go back to London; and no doubt a situation would be found for her as easily as before.

Steel herself as she would, when the day for Miss Leroy's departure came, Hester gave way, and she broke down altogether. She went to the railway-station to see the last of her.

"Keep up your heart," said her friend, trying to smile cheerfully, "and do not be afraid. Your luck is sure to turn."

Hester thanked her with a look, and squeezed her hand, which was resting on the carriage-window. She was exceedingly pale, and her eyes looked preternaturally large. Miss Leroy noted the change in her appearance. She ascribed it quite erroneously to Hester's grief at having to abandon her career. She did not know that Hester, who had been brought up in the comfort of a well-to-do English house, where even the servants eat meat three times a day, rarely had a sufficient meal; meat she only ate twice a week; and that her food on the alternate days was limited to the quasi-refuse of the Halles, eked out, in obedience to Razzio's



request, with milk and eggs. It was probably sufficient to maintain life; and had she not the consuming anxieties and worries of her position to endure—strength and spirit also.

“*Poste restante*, Milan, you know,” said Miss Leroy, from whose eyes the tears were now overflowing; “and, I tell you what—you’ll have good news to send me before the week is out.”

Hester shook her head: a great lump had risen in her throat, and was choking her.

“Never mind, dear; I shall be all right in March, you know, for I shall be back in England.”

“Oh! you won’t,” cried the other. “Hester, bear it in mind—I know it, I feel it—you’ll be a great artiste yet; and I’ll find you here flourishing to no end when I come back in September next. I bet you anything.”

Hester felt she was talking nonsense—utter nonsense; but the hearty goodwill and affection of the little American weighed with her notwithstanding.

“No, dear, no, never!—but don’t mind.”

“God spoke before you, as my old Irish nurse used to say,” said Delicia Leroy. “Good-bye, good-bye!”

The train steamed away out of the station, and Hester saw her one friend in Paris carried off from her.

She pulled down her veil to hide the tears which streamed so rapidly down her pale cheeks that she did not dare to go into the street, and she could not

control herself. She went to one of the waiting-rooms, and there, hidden in a corner, sobbed until she was exhausted. She remained there for at least an hour. She would miss her morning lesson with Razzio for the first time. What did it matter? All that would soon be at an end now; and with a heart filled with bitterness, she collected her strength and rose to go home to her lonely dwelling-place. It had been snowing all the morning, and the streets were as muddy as half-melted snow could make them. Hester had a long way to walk; her boots were thin, and one had a hole in it, and before she had gone far her feet were both wet. There was no help for it; so she trudged onward without faltering, taking the right turns mechanically. She knew Paris thoroughly now, thanks in good part to the kindly merry, little friend who, with words of friendly cheer and counsel on her lips to the very last, had but just left her.

“Why remain here until March?” thought Hester. “Why should I not give up the struggle at once? I only risk further difficulties in London; and if I spend my last pound I shall be reduced to beggary or the workhouse.”

She stood still for one moment, and a sort of horror of desolation seized upon her, and overcame her so that she found herself obliged to lean against a doorway for support. Something seemed to pass before her eyes and to dazzle her, and a cold perspiration covered her face; she remained standing still for a

moment to recover herself, then she pursued her way onwards.

There was a north-east wind driving down the Boulevard, so keen, so cold and searching, that poor Hester stooped her head before it, and holding her stout English umbrella well down in front of her.

Was it a large snowflake? What was the dazzling white thing that floated under the edge of her umbrella, and dropped softly and silently right before her weary feet? She looked, then stood still.

The white thing lay there, crisp, snowy, immaculate—though a whole lake of muddy slush was all around it—unstained, dry, and clean.

Something impelled Hester, who indeed saw but dimly through her tear-worn eyes, to stoop and lift it. A little piece of writing-paper, folded in three; when she had opened it, barely an inch wide; and written on it in round, clear writing:

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” (*Isaiah* xl. 39).

She read it twice over, wondering and reverent, then kissed and secured it in the folds of her dress.

It was as if some charm pervaded her, which exorcised all her rebellious, unworthy thoughts. She reached her rooms as if in a dream; changed her wet clothes, and had seated herself quietly to her work, when she was startled by a vigorous rap at her door. Half-frightened, she opened it.

One of Madame de Treilles' footmen stood there

holding a note in one hand, and in the other a bouquet of Russian violets.

"I await the reply," he said, handing both to her.

Hester broke open the envelope, scarcely crediting her own eyes, and read the following :

"What has become of you, my dear Miss Dalrymple ? I have had a letter from my sister-in-law asking all manner of questions about you. Come to tea this afternoon, and say 'yes' to the servant who gives you this, and the *coupé* will call for you about five o'clock."

"Yes," said Hester ; "that is the answer." The footman put one finger to his forehead in imitation of an English groom and disappeared.

Hester filled a glass with water and put the violets in it. She was very fond of flowers, and could with difficulty keep her eyes from the rich, nearly purple hues of these hothouse-reared exotics. The perfume was delightful to her.

"What can this mean ?" she puzzled. "I was certain that they had one and all forgotten my existence ; perhaps Mrs. Greville has found a means of inducing Lady Rosston to—but no ; I have not allowed her to know how badly off I am." She lost herself in conjecture to no purpose, for it never entered her head to imagine that Delicia Leroy could have had anything to do with this unexpected turn of affairs. The fact being that such was the case.

Miss Leroy had demanded an audience of Signor Razzio a few days before her own final departure from

Paris, and had informed him very plainly of the state of his pupil Miss Dalrymple's finance, and of her determination to return to England, and abandon her artistic career to embark once more on that of a governess.

Razzio listened very carefully, and with a wrathful frown on his face. Then he made an entry in a pocket-book, and finally thanked Miss Leroy for her information.

He was not long in acting upon it. He had "long arms," as he said himself, and could reach, personally or through his connections, most of the denizens of the *grande monde*. Before very long the Vicomtesse de Treilles was reminded of her whilom *protégée's* existence by a Legitimist Princess, who was a power in French society, and whose interest Razzio had skilfully evoked.

"I should like to see her," the Princess had said. "I want to read Shakspeare."

The Vicomtesse's dormant interest woke up at once; she had not altogether forgotten her sister-in-law's recommendations; but there was so much doing in Paris that winter that she could not possibly do justice to everything.

"I will send for her to meet you, Princess, at once. Come to tea on Thursday, and you shall see her. I promised my sister, Lady Rosston, to look after her and procure her pupils."

"Oh, for that," said the Princess, "my sister Armide wants a really good English governess for her girls."

"Oh! the little Roch Fides, are they so grown



now? Well, Princess, you shall have your desire on Thursday."

On Thursday, at a few minutes after five, Hester found herself once more ascending the luxurious flower-laden staircase of the Hôtel de Treilles. The warm, perfumed air caressed her face agreeably. What a contrast to the stone steps of her lodging! The currents of piercing cold air in the lobbies, the noise of the machines, the discordant voices, and the ill odour that seemed to rush out of the ateliers when a door chanced to open. Here the silence, the mellow lights, the refinement! The Vicomtesse met her in the ante-chamber and greeted her with effusion.

"How is it that we have not met so long, my dear Miss Dalrymple?"

Hester did not answer this question; the blame, she felt sure, was none of hers.

"I wished to see you, madame, very much." She stopped and hesitated a little; the moment was hardly propitious to introduce her affairs.

"I am told," broke in the Vicomtesse, scenting a request at once, and baffling it from sheer force of habit, "that your voice has greatly improved. I hope you will sing something for me to-day."

"That is impossible; I have signed an agreement with Signor Razzio, and dare not sing to *any one*. You know he is extremely strict. But, after all, I might as well: as things go, it cannot matter."

"How do you mean, Miss Dalrymple?"

“I mean that I find myself unable to maintain myself in Paris, and must renounce the career Signor Razzio was training me for.”

The Vicomtesse compressed her lips for an instant.

“Is this really so?”

“I return to London the first week of March: it is inevitable, alas!” They were now in the *salon*. “Allow me to present to you, Princess, Miss Dalrymple.”

The Princess spoke kindly to Hester, and introduced her to a Princesse de Cambrai. Both were pleased with the English girl’s simplicity and directness.

Their cultivated ears appreciated her well-bred accent; both of them addressed her in her own tongue. They inquired her address, and the Princess noted it in a jewelled tablet hanging on her *châtelaine*. Then the Vicomtesse asked Hester to sing.

After a moment’s hesitation she agreed to do so. A gentleman accompanied her on the piano. She took the first song that presented itself among the Vicomtesse’s collection. It was an English ballad, and she sang it thoroughly well as to the execution, doing Razzio ample justice, and her own voice as well.

When she had finished there was quite an outburst of enthusiasm. The Vicomtesse walked up and laid her hand on Hester’s shoulder in an almost maternal manner. She could not refrain from identifying herself, if only ever so little, with this triumph.

Her talent, now no longer problematical and merely hinted at, was shining in noon-day sunlight, and

observed and admired by all, had proved itself worthy of encouragement and protection. The Vicomtesse almost thought of taking this struggling genius into her house—of offering her a home. She reflected in time that the noise of practising would soon become intolerable.

“Will you sing us one more song? do!” asked a noble lady of Hester.

“I have already disobeyed in singing one,” replied Hester. “If Signor Razzio hears of it, he will be very angry.”

“No; no more,” commanded the Vicomtesse, with an air of absolute proprietorship; and then the matter was allowed to rest. The last distinguished novelist had just come in, and absorbed every one’s attention.

Hester left soon after unobserved, and took her way home on foot, not knowing if she had reason to be glad or sorry for what the afternoon had brought forth.

Razzio would be sure to hear of her singing, and she might expect a bad quarter of an hour with him on that score. Even so it would afford her a good opportunity of informing him of her change of plans, a communication which she rather dreaded making.

But the necessity for doing so never arose. The next morning brought Hester three letters—one from the Princesse de Cambrai, one from the Duchesse de Roch Fide, and one from the Vicomtesse de Treilles. She was offered more work than she could undertake; and what was best of all, the Princess, who required a companion for a delicate, backward child offered a

position in her family to Miss Dalrymple. Her music and voice-practising need not be neglected. The salary was handsome. She accepted joyfully; and when she next went to her lesson with Razzio, received the expected scolding, which was indeed thunderous, with a meekness which disarmed the angry *maestro*.

Her luck had turned now once for all; and during her stay in Paris, from the day on which she found the tiny folded paper floating spotless and white above the mud and slush of the Boulevard, the promise therein contained was never broken. She made friends and kept them; her squalid lodgings were exchanged for a luxurious room in the Hôtel de Cambrai. Her time was fully occupied, and handsomely remunerated. She was even able to save some money, a duty which she felt imperative, for day by day her debt to Razzio kept growing.

Time passed rapidly now; the weeks became months; the months stretched themselves into years; and then there came at last a day, early in April, when Hester paid her teacher a visit of adieu and thanks.

She was now in her twenty-fourth year, and seemed taller than when we first saw her. The slim, girlish figure had developed into that of a well-grown, finely-proportioned woman. Her voice had improved in volume as well as quality. Razzio had done his best, his all, for her.

He was pacing up and down the room, gesticulating, lecturing, scolding.

"Opera, I say; opera for you! Your English *morgue* prevent you! Object to theatre!—humbug! You have a voice for anything. Nothing so difficult to get on as oratorio; and as for concerts—stuff! you will obtain no engagements for concerts until you have made a renown in opera. Tell me!—why, this moment I speak the singers have to pay to sing in concerts in London. You hear that?—pay to be heard!"

"Signor Razzio, my mind is made up. I will not, can not, sing in opera."

"Will not!—can not!" mimicked he. "Ugh!" he grunted, with supreme disgust. "Please tell me then, most obstinate and perverse Miss, how you do intend to live?—and how you do intend to pay me my four years' labour with you—eh?"

It was the first time in the said four years Razzio had alluded to her indebtedness. Hester started and flushed scarlet. She was silent for a moment, possessed by the thought that she was in Razzio's power—that he had an absolute right to dictate. She drooped her head sadly, but inwardly vowing that come what would the theatre she would never enter.

"Well, there, there!" said the master, who if ill-tempered was certainly good-hearted. Then he tapped the back of her hand amiably. "I did not intend to say that, but you are an artiste, and as an artiste how can you refuse yourself to a *rôle* such as *Fidelio*?—think of *Fidelio*—*Norma*!—Well, you will be sorry. There is *Rostroffsky*—such a voice! such a school! and just



such a fine person as you—made, shaped for theatre. No; she too—‘I will not play Venus in Tannhauser! Traviata! never!’ Nonsense!—she sing in concerts, sing where she can; and now broken and disgusted she retires to Moscow to teach—to take a place in the house of Princess Lubomirsky. Such an end to a career! Ah, well, you shall have a letter to my old friend Courlis; he will, I am sure, do his best for you. You are highly protected. The Duchess and Princess will introduce you to their great friends in London, and they will engage you to sing for nothing to people who will be of use to you. I know them. Very well; now, when your time is gone, your money gone, and your patience and hopes too—my dear Miss, write to me, and I will open to you the door—of the grand opera.”

Hester listened with a feeling something akin to terror to this peroration of Razzio. She knew that his experience was not to be questioned, and a sensation of dull despair took possession of her for a moment. Then she remembered her old trials, and she repeated the words of the text, her talisman, to herself, and in them she found consolation and promise.

She took leave of her teacher with regret. Their connection had lasted long enough to make each feel a kind of friendly regard for the other. Razzio respected and liked his pupil, and Hester felt, over and above her gratitude for his generous treatment, an intense admiration for his talent. She was in a great hurry to get away. The sense of her debt to Razzio was ever

present with her, and like all singers she fixed her eyes on London as an Eldorado.

She accepted an invitation from Mrs. Greville to stop with her until she should find a suitable home. They had maintained a correspondence, at long intervals, it is true, for the elder lady was heavily burthened with her own and other people's affairs, and Hester's was no idle life. Year by year, although her immediate necessities had been provided for, the steadily growing sum of indebtedness to Razzio was mounting up, and Hester resolved to practise the most rigid economy, until it should be discharged to the last farthing.

"You certainly have been very brave," remarked Mrs. Greville to her, the day of her arrival in London, "and as fortunate as brave." They were sitting in the window-seat of the same little room where Hester had been received the day that she came in all her fresh mourning to crave the advice and aid of her parish clergyman's wife. The room was the same—some few things were different. Mrs. Greville's hair showed a streak or two of grey, a few more lines had engraved themselves around her gentle eyes; her manner was, if possible, softer and more subdued.

"Do not imagine that I was always in this mood of calm and easy confidence," said Hester. "I feel possessed of determination enough and *morgue* enough to storm London just now. You remember three years back there was a kind of lapse, a hiatus in our correspondence. I assure you I was at very low ebb,

mentally and monetarily, then. I had lost all hope. It was a question of abandoning singing, and returning here to resume teaching."

"My dear girl!"

"Yes. I kept it to myself. Well, when things were at their worst, and the very day that my only friend in Paris left for good, I picked up this in the street."

She opened her pocket-book and handed the scrap of paper, with the text from Isaiah written on it, to Mrs. Greville.

"I found it at my feet, floating on top of a mud-puddle, as clean and dry as you see it now. I gave up despairing, I can tell you, then and there, and trying to see my way out of the difficulties, as it chanced, my deliverance came speedily and thoroughly."

"And ever since you have had no troubles?"

"No troubles, if you will, but I have anxiety enough and to spare. There is my debt to Razzio—"

"Well, don't think of that," said Mrs. Greville, who had observed Hester's face cloud over.

"Think of it!—dear Mrs. Greville, I am pursued by the thought day and night."

Although it was the very day of her arrival, and she was necessarily weary after her night journey from Paris, Hester went out to deliver her letter to Courlis, the great impresario, purveyor, and teacher, to whom Razzio had recommended her; and to call in Curzon Street and leave some packages for Lady Rosston, which her sister-in-law had entrusted to Hester.

The great Courlis inhabited a mansion in one of the streets contiguous to Portland Place. When the door was opened a burst of familiar sound, a curious vibration in it, swept over her face as it passed out. Stringed instruments and voices mingled—subdued, and far off; yet with a rhythmic thrill in it to which something in Hester answered. “I too am a musician,” she thought, as she handed her letter and card to the servant, and then turned away down the steps, humming a tune. She was a musician—but nothing more than an amateur—otherwise she would have demanded an immediate audience of Courlis, and presented her letter in person. As it was, that hero took the contents of the salver which the parlour-maid presented to him, and glancing at Razzio’s letter, which was indeed difficult of reading, tossed it into the grate, and surveyed the card with his nose in the air.

“Is she dere? show hair up.”

“Lady’s gone, sir.”

“Peuh!” observed Courlis with ineffable contempt, and sent the card to join the letter.

“Time! time!” he almost screeched to his musicians, who had profited by his momentary abstraction to miss a beat.

Little thinking of the reception which her much-prized letter of introduction had met with, Hester made haste to cross Oxford Street, and took the direction of Mayfair by the shortest route. It was not long before she found herself in the well-remembered street. A great hatchment hung over the door. Hester was in

the act of speculating as to who the noble relative could be, when the barouche rolled up, and she saw Lady Rosston, accompanied by Grizel and Helen, who was now fully grown-up, although her appearance had been delayed, descend from the same. The recognition was immediate and cordial. Lady Rosston had grown stout, and her complexion looked fearfully brilliant in contrast with her mourning-bonnet. Grizel had greatly improved, and there being no one by to attitudinize for, was natural—for a wonder.

In the hall, waiting for them, and in no perceptible manner changed, was the inevitable Miss Boldene. To see Helen, with her arm affectionately passed through Miss Dalrymple's, was enough to stimulate her ever-ready and obedient sympathies, and before Hester was conscious of the fact, Miss Boldene had kissed her.

"So, so glad to see you again," she gushed. Then they all went into the morning-room. Hester gave an account of herself, delivered her messages and packets, and told them where she lived.

"Let me see," said Lady Rosston; "now we must all go to work, and make a great success for you. Malvina, you are to trumpet Miss Dalrymple's praises everywhere, and get her no end of engagements. Mind you let us know when you make your first public appearance. I shall make up a perfect *claque* for you. You see we are in black just now, and have to keep quiet, otherwise I should consider myself bound to give something for you."



"Yes," added Helen, "such a pity!"

"It really is," acquiesced Miss Boldene. "I don't know, after all—an afternoon now, and music *only*, Lady Rosston. The Duchess, and a few of one's immediate friends . . ."

"We will say nothing about it just now. Keep it among ourselves," answered Lady Rosston, with a comprehensive glance to her daughters and Miss Boldene. She could not refrain from availing herself of Hester as "a novelty."

"I er—shall treat you *en amie*, my dear Miss Dalrymple—er—I am anxious to have you make a success, and you will meet people who will be of use to you. I shall let you know the day: it will be in the afternoon, you know."

"To sing for nothing for people who will be of use to me," thought Hester with a sort of terror.

Razzio's words rang in Hester's ears like a prophecy. Already! already! She turned a little pale as she murmured some words of acknowledgment. After all she owed a great deal to Lady Rosston, and she determined that she would sing for her as often as she was asked.

Miss Boldene, who was revolving in her practised brain a series of schemes for having a turn out of the "novelty," also for her own profit and behoof, now advanced.

"How improved you are, my dear girl!" she said in a tone which for friendly condescension outpatronized that of the patroness Lady Rosston herself. "You are

staying with Mrs. Greville. I shall run across the Park and pay you both a visit one of these days, very soon."

Hester repeated Miss Boldene's message to Mrs. Greville when she got home. That lady thought for a moment, and then said :

"Mr. Cecil is coming to lunch to-morrow on purpose to make your acquaintance. Did you ever meet him before? I shall write to-night to Malvina Boldene, and ask her to come. She knows him."

"Cecil!" repeated Hester. "I have an indistinct recollection of him." Her mind travelled back, revisiting in memory the scenes of five years ago, and she saw herself one of the choir the Sunday before her uncle Vining was taken ill, and the new curate, a Mr. Cecil, was there, correcting and commending her almost in the same breath. Then came back to her the pleased feeling with which she had listened to his praise—the first she had ever gained.

Miss Boldene arrived punctually, and on going into the dining-room they found the curate waiting for them. He was about thirty-four or five, of Oxford breeding, as was plain the moment he spoke; not that his accent or manner betrayed what has been called "the twiddling Oxford man." He was plain of feature, but with an intellectual and distinguished expression, tall and sinewy-looking, and very quiet and reserved in manner.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you before in the choir," he said, shaking hands with Hester.

"Yes," she said; "I recollect you one Sunday. You gave me a very candid opinion about singing wildly."

"She has laid your recommendation to heart, I can assure you, Mr. Cecil," observed Miss Boldene. "Our young friend has overcome *all* her faults now. You will hardly hear such a voice or manner anywhere. Quite magnificent."

Mr. Cecil raised his eyes and looked at the speaker. Miss Boldene was seated where the daylight shone right on that work of art—her countenance; queer greenish-yellow tints appeared in her hair, and still queerer reflections from violet-powder and bloom de Ninon on her nose and cheeks. Then he looked at her *vis-à-vis*.

"How delightful a clean face is!" he thought approvingly; "not even a fringe."

Hester had not spent four years in Paris without learning how to dress herself. Her hair and simple black gown proclaimed themselves good style at the first glance. She was talking to Miss Boldene, who was inquiring categorically after the Cambrais, De Treilles, Roch Fides. Mr. Cecil waited for his opportunity.

"Yes; I studied with Razzio," replied Hester; "and he has been good enough to give me a letter to Courlis, which I delivered yesterday."

"Did you see him?"

"No; I merely called and left my letters and card."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Cecil. After a pause he added: "If I might advise you. I know Courlis; you

should go to the house again, and demand an interview off-hand. He will never call, still less write."

Hester looked dismayed.

"If you think so, I had better do so at once. I cannot afford to lose a day that can be helped."

"By all means," observed Miss Boldene, didactically; "do not lose a moment."

In spite of herself Hester's grey eyes met the curate's grey eyes, and exchanged a sort of tacit laugh; not a muscle of their faces smiled, only the eyes; and somehow from that minute they had become friends.

Something less than three-quarters of an hour later saw Hester in a hansom, making straight for Courlis' abode once more.

The servant opened the door wide as if expecting the lady to walk in and up-stairs; she did in fact mistake her for a pupil; and naturally enough.

"Will you, if you please, take up my card," said Hester, "and I will wait?"

The domestic vanished and returned speedily, holding the card between her finger and thumb.

"Please 'm," she said, "Mr. Courlis is having a rehearsal, and he don't know the name; would you write your message, 'm, please?"

Hester's heart began to beat rapidly with fright.

"I was here yesterday," she said, pulling out her pencil-case, "and left a letter from Signor Razzio and my card." She scribbled something as legibly as her trembling fingers would allow, something to this purport,

on the card, and once more the servant sought Courlis' dreaded presence.

She re-appeared directly, and requested Hester to walk up.

The door which the servant opened on the first floor lobby admitted her to a great square room, in which there seemed to be a disproportionate quantity of chairs and looking-glasses. But Hester's eyes were less occupied than her ears. A very tall woman, dressed in a close-fitting black cloth costume, which certainly did not conceal her rather heroic proportions, was singing a duet with an Italian baritone, both trilling and shaking at the pitch of their voices, and reminding the onlooker irresistibly of a couple of dicky-birds trying to sing each other down.

Courlis, a kind of stouter and larger copy of Razzio, was seated at the piano, playing away steadily, and to all intent and purpose in a state of beatitude. He managed to distract himself sufficiently to cast a glance full of suspicion and distrust at Hester, and to bow over the keyboard to her.

Presently the duettists sang themselves out. The baritone, who was attired in the inevitable frock-coat, light trousers, and collar open to the breast-bone, fanned his sallow visage with a patchouli-laden handkerchief, and retired to the nearest window where the tenor, a thinner, younger man with a collar open still lower down, was humming something out of a sheet of music in his hand. The lady, whose soprano voice was really



magnificent, turned her back unceremoniously on the gentleman who had been vowing eternal regard at the pitch of his lungs in choice Italian, and seeking the nearest mirror began to put her fringe in order.

"You come to me, Mees Da—hum ! from my esteemed friend, Razzio ?" Courlis had risen from the piano, and was bowing before Miss Dalrymple.

"Yes," she replied. "I sent a letter which Signor Razzio gave me for you yesterday ; I have been his pupil for four years."

"And what can I do for you ?"

"I want engagements. I have a contralto voice—pupils." Hester took her courage by the two ears.

"London is full of people wanting engagements, my dear Mees. You are in presence of Miss Rostroffsky, of whom you have heard, of course ; even she demand engagements. Is it not so, Mamzelle ?"

"Hum !" answered Mamzelle, evidently addressing herself in the dingy mirror, for she did not condescend even to turn round.

"Monsieur Razzio"—Hester hesitated. They all looked hostile. The Rostroffsky, while pretending to pat her own fringe, was surveying her in the mirror. The baritone and the tenor were staring most impatiently. Courlis had the air of enduring an intrusion and interruption.

"Monsieur Razzio asked you to hear me sing," she said timidly. It was her last chance. She felt if she were to blench it would be all over with her, and

that if she left the house she could never enter it again.

"Wit pleasure!" bowed Courlis; "what will you tek? Contralto, you say: tek dis."

"Have you 'Elijah'?" asked Hester, who felt it was do or die. "I should like to sing 'Rest in the Lord.'"

"Barolo, my child, hand down 'Elijah' up dere on the Mendelssohn shelf." The tenor obeyed, and the music was soon before Hester.

Courlis played the preliminary chords with an expression of patient devotion. Barolo the tenor and Faquini the baritone exchanged an expectant grin. Miss Rostroffsky turned round and surveyed the stranger with an expression, half of pity, half of scorn, which vanished the moment Hester opened her mouth, to give place to a gradually deepening look of admiration and respect. Hester sang her best, and astonished even herself.

"Magnificent!—superb! I compliment you, Mees," exclaimed Courlis, jumping up and seizing her hand. Then he presented the artists one by one; each and all were adulatory—Barolo and Faquini enthusiastically so. Miss Rostroffsky had tears of artistic emotion in her somewhat obliquely-set eyes. She took the contralto's hand in one of hers, pressed it affectionately, and with the other stroked Hester's back as she might that of a prepossessing cat.

"Quite superb, dear Miss; I félicite you."

Hester felt grateful and elated. She had been accustomed—at least for the last three months of her

stay in Paris—to the applause of the Princess de Cambrai's salon; but this was different. Miss Rostroffsky was a celebrated singer; Barolo and Faquini were well-known names in the singing world. These were competent judges—*cognoscenti*! It was her first test; she felt that she had successfully passed the ordeal.

The Russian *prima donna*, who, had Miss Dalrymple been a soprano, would have perished before according her a syllable of commendation, was now scanning her with an experienced eye. Nothing *postiche*—simply, elegantly dressed; manners of a lady; dignified and self-possessed; evidently perfectly respectable—a charming personage, she summed up. She was all this herself, according to the Slav code, which differs only in detail from that of English society.

“You propose to commence in London, Mees, I understand,” observed Miss Rostroffsky. “Well, I am just finishing; I yield to you de field!”

“You are leaving London?” hazarded Hester.

“Chess,” replied the Russian, who was really Finn. She meant “Yes.” “I go to Moscow—Prince Lubomirsky's chapel. I am done wit dis life.”

“Pooh, madselle! pooh! Miss Dalrymple, figure to yourself—just because she was asked to take certain operatic parts, she flies out, and we are to lose one of our finest sopranos.”

“I do not see, Monsieur Courlis, wat dat got to do wit you. I range my own affairs,” observed Miss Rostroffsky, with flashing eyes, and drawing herself up so

majestically that Courlis sat down, crushed, on a music-chair. Barolo and Faquini retreated terrified into their window with much the air of frightened rabbits making for their burrow.

"Quite right, mam'zelle," submitted Courlis. "I respect above all the *libre arbitre*—how you call him?"

"Friville—friville," supplied mam'zelle—she was proud of her English—who was inserting her large self into a huge fur coat.

"Now, to-morrow, rehearsal at St. Jem's Hall at half-past twelf. Miss Rostroffsky is always punckshal. Barolo and Faquini, dere is no east wind, do rise a littel early, now, for my sake, and be dere at de time. Mamzelle Dalrymple, permit me to offer you tickets for the Tuesday concert, the first of a series of seven."

"I will take you with me to rehearsal," said Miss Rostroffsky to Hester, "if you like."

"Thank you," said Hester, but she noticed now a general air of departure in the room. Barolo and Faquini were rolling up their throats with interminable bandages of silks and woollens. Courlis was affecting to close the piano. Hester felt that the result of her visit, up to this point, was simply a couple of concert tickets. With a great effort she commanded her voice, and said :

"Monsieur Courlis, could you tell me how to get an engagement? Have you the lists made out for all the seven concerts?"

Courlis shook his black ringlets with a pitying air.

"Made out since October, dear young lady. Vull—vull—too *vull*."

"How am I to do to get work?" asked Hester in desperation.

"You have an agent—no; well, you must have an agent, and you must get your voice known and talked about, and you must make relations with de Press; indisputable dat de Press do everything. The public" (pronounced "pewblic") "beliefs the Press, and noting else."

"Chess," assented the soprano, who was putting on her fur hat before the glass. "The English pewblic runs where de papers tell them; as for music, dey knows noting at all about it—noting; and de Press knows less still."

"Noting—*no ting*," echoed Barolo and Faquini. "De music critiques, I am tole," pursued the Russian oracle, with the utmost gravity, "are all write by Irish, an dey write dem wrong: express, bad, you say, on purpose. Yes; de English have behave bad to dat people an dey take dere revench so."

Hester's sense of the ridiculous compelled her to laugh outright.

"Loff, Mees; but you have not yet had to indure critiques. I spik de truf. I know one young Irish—perfect, splendide basso; and he tole me wat I say. Well, adieu, Mon. Courlis; adieu, Messieurs; *au revoir*, Mees; dere is my cart. Ah! you descend wit me."

Hester and the Russian soprano found themselves in the street together.



"I tek hansom," remarked the latter lady, signalling a London gondola with her umbrella.

"Your street is quite close, Mademoiselle," observed Hester, who had been looking at the card; "it is not worth while."

"To walk is not possible in London, for person like me—person so striking as me," said Miss Rostroffsky. "Have you not observe that man who passed, how he look at me? It is so wit all men. Faquini, he is the baritone, he is also artist in sculpture; did you not observe how he never remove his eye from my head and shoulder? I have a quite remarkable *gorge*. I can assure you Faquini never attends rehearsals nor repetitions. He come to Courlis to-day—why? Because *I am dere*."

Hester looked at the big woman with a stare, partly of wonder, partly of fear; could she be mad? The man who had just passed had certainly glanced at the somewhat odd figure presented by Miss Rostroffsky, who was five feet eleven and a half inches tall, and who was clad in a very remarkable manner. She remained silent, perplexed, and wondering.

"Well!" said her new friend, in a good-natured if somewhat majestic tone. "Adieu! you hav my cart. I expect you to-morrow at twelve."

Hester looked after the hansom as it rolled off for a minute or two with a puzzled face. She could not tell what to make of its occupant; neither was she altogether pleased with the result of her visit to Courlis.

She proceeded homewards in rather a brown study, ruminating all that she had heard and seen, and arranging in her mind the various heads of her projected conversation with Miss Rostroffsky on the morrow. As she walked along, she overtook the singing gentlemen of the Courlis' party, much swathed as to the throat; wide-brimmed black hats well cocked on their ears, that were removed, needless to say, with dramatic flourishes on Miss Dalrymple's approach. She did not much care for the appearance afforded by the baritone and tenor. Harmless mortals enough. Barolo was bound to his dentist; a front tooth was threatening to become loose, preparatory to falling out; one of the greatest calamities that can befall a singer is to lose a front tooth, as a false tooth spoils the elasticity of the sound. After his visit to the dentist, Faquini and he had their dinner to select, also with due regard to their voices, and to the preservation of their figures as well; for it is an unfortunate circumstance that what is good for the voice is invariably favourable to the deposit of adipose tissue, a very serious drawback indeed, especially in the case of Barolo, who was studying with Courlis for *primo tenore* parts. Underdone eggs, rich soups, oil, and London stout, however beneficial to the throat, and agreeable in themselves, become in time ruinous to the figure. Out-of-door exercise is the counter-agent usually recommended, but the ordinary Italian constitution is averse to exercise, and a melancholy resignation, broken now

and again by a spasmodic effort, marked the attitude of the tenor and baritone alike.

Hester related her experiences to Mrs. Greville. At the time the novelty and oddity of the situation had impressed her more than its humorous aspect; but at this distance she thought of innumerable droll incidents. The striking timidity of the Italian tenor, who was "also artist in sculpture," and who, in common with Faquini and most of their congeners, held the Russian soprano, who was as *farouche* as a Siberian bear, in mingled awe and dislike, had not escaped Hester. His terror of her was unmistakable. Mrs. Greville was highly amused by the picture of the repetition. She agreed with Hester that she was as yet unable to report much progress, and counselled her by all means to accept Miss Rostroffsky's invitation. From all points of view it was desirable, and were it only to get information about a suitable agent, the opportunity should not be neglected.

Ten minutes to twelve found Hester, next day, knocking at Miss Rostroffsky's door. It was a genial spring day, sunny and pleasant, and in spite of some misgivings Hester felt in good spirits. A very untidy servant with a dirty face opened the door, and in reply to Hester's inquiry gabbled rapidly:

"First floor, right 'and," and disappeared into the darkness whence she had come.

Hester's ear caught a sound which seemed familiar, and following it, she took her away up-stairs.

The sound gathered in strength and volume, and culminated as she opened, after tapping at it in vain, the "right hand" door indicated by the abigail downstairs.

A strange spectacle presented itself. Prone on her back, and stretched out full length on the floor, was Miss Rostroffsky, singing as she lay a trill at full pitch of her lungs to the accompaniment of the piano, at which a little dried-up-looking old man was seated, stolidly pounding away. The singer shook her finger at Miss Dalrymple, in token that she was to wait a moment or two, and continued shaking on a high note. Hester closed the door noiselessly, and sat down, trying not to look astonished, and turning her eyes away from the prostrate giantess, surveyed the room. This last, indeed, offered little to reward her scrutiny, and was an average sample of the hideous, ignoble taste of the British lodging-house-keeper. Chairs, to sit on which was an act of penance; a sofa, which from the nature of its stuffing was no abiding-place of rest; little tables with sprawling legs, which caught your foot as you passed, trimmed round with frowzy penny lace; a mantelpiece with a bright green fringe and brass-headed nails; a mirror which reflected everything greenish. Hester's eye was offended; the contrast with Mrs. Greville's cultivated taste and the magnificence of the Hotel de Cambrai was a shock. She noticed some redeeming touches: a handsome Russian leather case stood on one of the tables; several bouquets in various

stages of dissolution were on the mantelpiece and elsewhere; and some photographs which she could see were of members of the Rostroffsky family, stood here and there in handsome frames.

Suddenly the singing ended, and the recumbent posture with it. Miss Rostroffsky jumped up with more agility than Hester thought possible, and advanced to greet her visitor with every appearance of cordial welcome.

"Sharmed to see you; permit that I present to you, Mr. Nixeswald."

Mr. Nixeswald made a bow which proclaimed him foreign quite as much as his name. He was a queer little man, with a shrivelled, reddish-complexioned face destitute of beard; a black stock enveloped his neck to the chin, and covered the interval between it and his threadbare, tightly-buttoned coat. He surveyed Hester with a fleeting but comprehensive glance, and sat down again to all appearance oblivious of everything save the sheet of music which Miss Rostroffsky had just handed him.

"Mr. Nixeswald is my accompanist," observed Miss Rostroffsky, speaking exactly as if the personage alluded to were ten miles off. "I recommend him to you as best in London. He accompany Madame Caglia and Petersen."

"Really!" said Hester. For these were the two greatest names in the singing world.

"Chess! He used to teach Grisi, Albani, Rubini: an dey say he taught so far back as Cuzzoni and Farinelli."



"Farinelli! oh!" exclaimed Hester; "that was in the time of George the Second or George the Third."

"I do not know," answered Miss Rostroffsky, which was quite true; "some calls him de Wandering Juch—*Jude*—how you say—Chew?—tank you—of music. Does he not resemble a *hareng*?" she whispered: then aloud:

"Mr. Nixeswald, I think I will repeat once more my song." The personage addressed nodded and placed a full sheet on the stand.

It was the 'Shadow Song' from 'Dinorah.' Miss Rostroffsky drew herself up very straight, took her music, and arranged herself upon the hearthrug precisely in the attitude of a public singer waiting for the orchestra to have finished the introduction, filled her great lungs with air, and emitted the first few notes of the celebrated song. Hester involuntarily, unconsciously even, imitated all these gestures.

All of a sudden the accompaniment stopped, and the player emitted a kind of bark.

"Dake de notes full,—so;" he sang the bar, to Hester's surprise, with a queer little shred of a voice, it is true, but with a melody and truth which showed that "the herring," as his disrespectful pupil termed him, was no contemptible artist. The pupil accepted his correction gratefully, and once more set everything in the room quivering to the vibrations of her really powerful voice.

"You sing, Mr. Nixeswald," said Hester to the accompanist.

"Oh no, Mees."

"He have could able once," observed Miss Rostroffsky; "I must tek a bottle staout wit me. You drink staout, Miss Dalrymple—no?"

"Oh! you vill haf to drink porterre," commented Nixeswald. "Caglia drinks it; Petersen too; all of you who sing tek staout."

"And nefer tea," added Miss Rostroffsky, "except very wik."

"Thé and café, it is my experience, are two breuvages abominable, and quite poison," observed Nixeswald; "porterre for troat. Wine I do not like."

"You drink staout den?" remarked Miss Rostroffsky, who was putting a bottle of the charmed beverage and a corkscrew into a bag.

"No," replied he, emphatically.

"What then do you drink?" inquired Hester, impelled by purely innocent curiosity.

"*Eau de vie tout simple*," he made answer, in a laconic, matter-of-fact tone. Hester restrained an inclination to laugh, which Miss Rostroffsky indulged largely.

"Gum, Mees, gum, widout delay. Adieu, Mr. Nixeswald, adieu." Thus Miss Rostroffsky; and dragging Hester with her, she descended the stairs rapidly.

A hansom was waiting.

"Saint Jem's Hall," she ordered. The man cocked his eye at the music-roll and the bag; and then eyed the two ladies with interest.

Nixeswald seized his hat and attended them to the

cab. Hester remarked his manner, and thought to herself that he must have seen better days. As soon as he had handed them in, he trotted off, almost at a run, to a grand house in Grosvenor Square, where Petersen was stopping on a visit, to repeat songs with her; and when that task was done, went to give music-lessons at a boarding-school in the north of London. After this, he betook himself to an eating-house close by Leicester Square, where he dined; selecting his dishes with utter disregard to his voice or figure. Then his "littell small room" received him into its somewhat stuffy precincts, and without loss of time he set to work to copy music for an orchestra by the light of a cheap little petroleum lamp, the glare of which made his eyes red. A great German pipe filled the room with the fumes of cheap tobacco. But until late in the morning he worked away, copying hundreds and hundreds of demi-semi-quavers. Then the lamp began to add its fumes to those of the big porcelain pipe, and Herr Nixeswald rose and stretched himself, and shook the ashes out of the pipe. On the mantelpiece were two queer, blurred, old photographs. The outlines and some yellow shadows, all speckled over, were all that remained of the presentments of a very ugly woman, with a strongly-marked German face, and a child who looked like a queer little reduction of herself. Nixeswald looked at them with reverence — kissed them tenderly, and restored them to their place beside his pipe. Then he went to bed, in a comical little bed

behind a screen. Such was the every day existence led by the "herring"—solitary and obscure, but by no means without a certain dignity—pathos even, of its own.

To go back to the hansom.

"Nixeswald, he is a good creature," observed Miss Rostroffsky; "poor *hareng*, I call him. I am told he is a political refugee. It will make me very glad if you employ him sometimes. He supports his sister, a wid-wo, and her children. He teaches, and he copies music, and lives by himself in a littel, small room, in quite de roof of a house in Oxford Street. *Tra la la lira la ton taril ton ton!*"

This was a *roulade* so loud and sudden that the cabman opened the trap and peeped down.

"Oh chess," said the singer, apostrophizing him, "you can look and hear, and all for nothing. My dear friend, dat is what you like, to hear sing and not pay. Dem people is all alike. Come to my afternoon, and you shall meet de Duchesse de Kitterston. She vill be of use to you, and I save twenty guineas. Dere is your English *grande dame*. Oh! you Miss, you haf to learn how mean English rich people is. Here now," she added as the cab stopped; "dis concert pay twenty guineas, and my dress cost fifteen guineas; it is quite to mek fortune I sing. Here! you!"

This last was to the cabman, to whom she tendered his exact legal fare. He was disappointed, for persons who speak with a foreign accent are looked upon as fair

game by the cabmen; but the height and threatening aspect of the lady awed him, and he contented himself with grinning at the coin, then turned his hat back to front, lashed up the horse, and departed nearly at a gallop.

“Gunglius’ concerts,” she observed; “yes, he is a man that pays his artists. Enter dis way.”

She led the way to a side-door, conducting by a narrow passage to the artists’ room.

“Tickets, ladies, please!” said an official, barring the way.

“No,” said Miss Rostroffsky, waving him back with immense dignity. “I am sing.”

Another door opened and gave egress to a huge wave of sustained sound. A famous German orchestra was rehearsing the ‘Pastoral Symphony.’ Miss Rostroffsky drew a deep breath of delight, and threw back her head like a hunting horse that hears the hounds. In she marched, and took a seat in the auditorium, Hester beside her.

“Dere’s Gunglius,” she said, bowing graciously in return for a quasi-military salute from the conductor’s *bâton*. “How well dat goes; hear dem *cellos*! I will assure you only Germans can play like dat. Most dose is Germans. A-a-h: *musique*!”

Miss Rostroffsky went off into a sort of ecstasy; her *blonde cendré* head all on one side. “Nothing,” she continued, “like the *musique* of Beethoven. What a heart! What a gigantesque intelleck! Hear dat! m—m—m!”



But a sudden shriek from Gunglius brought her rhapsodies to a close.

"*Primos!*" he shouted, beating on his desk frantically. "Gentlemen! *Primos!* which off you plays a naytural? Again! six bars back. Hah!"

"Gunglius," nodded Miss Rostroffsky, "splendide conductor—and pays his artists too."

"Do you mean to say, Miss Rostroffsky," asked Hester, anxiously, "that there are people who don't pay?"

"My poor dear littel ding," replied the soprano, in a caressing, semi-affectionate, semi-contemptuous tone, "can it be possible you know not the habits of dis country—your own? De English is a most musical nation, and lof to get it for nothing. You will be invite to innumerable concerts: to sing for charity; to sing for brother artist; to sing for sister artiste; to sing for the prince, who weesh to hear your so-renowned woice; for the princesse—she too also weesh to hear you; for the dear duchess, who follow after the princesse—'I will not, eh, hem, offer you anything, but you will meet people who will be of use to you. E-e-eh!'" Miss Rostroffsky's imitation of the voice and smile of a London fine lady would have thrown Hester at any other time into a fit of laughter.

"Look up dere," continued the soprano. "I see a man dere: he is waiting to speak with Gunglius. That is the Anatolian violinist Redeschev—poor young man! He plays superbly. He came here six months ago to

pick up gold in the streets of London. Well, he could not get an engagement at first, so he had some introductions in society, and he got invitations enough everywhere to play for nothing. Just one person pay him five pounds."

"How mean!" exclaimed Hester.

"Chess, and he owe his friends money."

"Why do professionals sing and play for nothing? Surely they have the remedy in their own hands."

"You will see; and dose Thursday concerts dat Courlis gives, he pays nobody. Caglia she is paid, and Petersen she is well paid; de others pay Courlis to allow them to be heard. Den your voice get known, get talked of; you get engagements—at least you hope so. You see Caglia and Petersen dey take so much money dere is nothing left for the small ones. I sang once at a barty long ago for a lady; she pay nothing—not even send her carriage for me; but I got an engagement of thirty pounds. It is a chance, you see."

"But your agent, surely he makes engagements for you, and arranges your business?"

"Agents dey take five per cent," observed Miss Rostroffsky, rather dryly. "The papers is the thing. How you do, Miss Zerlackner? Allow me present to you Mees Dalrymple: superb contralto just arrive from Paris."

Miss Zerlackner's part in the programme was to sing Hungarian popular sings. She bowed to Hester and sat down, untying her bonnet-strings, for her time came as soon as a quartette was over.

"Dear Miss Rostroffsky, do you sing at Manchester?"

I am engaged for it dis morning by Sterbelt—ten guineas each concert; and I have to buy two dresses. Oh dose dresses!”

“Hah!” grunted Miss Rostroffsky. “Dere is your engagement—ten guineas to sing, and fifteen for a frock to sing in; and Sterbelt will complain if you are not well-dressed. No; I am not engaged; perhaps will I find letter on my return from Sterbelt, I tell dis lady. She begins, you know, of the people who not pay.”

“Oh, my dear Miss!” cried Miss Zerlackner, “it is I who can tell you of dem. Chust last month I have made such an experiment. Mr. Isaacson, you have heard of that rich young Jew, so amateur of singing: he have a splendid house in Chester Square. Well! he want a performance dere of one of Halévy’s operas, and ask me to undertake to get him the singers. ‘You know, Miss Zerlackner, dis is pusiness,’ he say to me. Good: I get everybody—chorus, tenor, baritone; his friends take some parts; Redeschev, I see him dere, for violin. We had *four—four* rehearsals; it was a great success. He had his rooms decorated with white flowers—fifty guineas’ worth of flowers,—and pay not one of us. I wrote to him *three times*. I remind him he agreed it was pusiness. No answer—not a penny.”

“Why not employ a lawyer?” asked Hester.

“Oh!” answered Miss Rostroffsky, “you make an enemy den—you don’t dare to do dat; and dat young Chew has ten thousand a year.”

“Well, he is not English,” said Hester, who began to

think her friends were considering the matter with some bias.

"Dere comes Helen Kenneth, pianiste—she plays Chopin as no one else can. She must play now for Gunglius to take the time of her piece. Yes; dat lovely nocturne."

"I wonder if Mrs. Chrysostom Brown has pay her yet?" remarked Miss Rostroffsky. "Just listen this, Miss Dalrymple. Dere is a great lady at Oxford, Mrs. Chrysostom Brown, and she employ Miss Kenneth. The Grand Duke Leonard was visiting Oxford, and Mrs. Chrysostom Brown entertain him superbly. She wrote to Miss Kenneth and ask her to come and play the thirteenth at *soirée*, and the twenty-second at a musical entertainment. She mention nothing of terms, but of course it is an engagement. Mrs. Chrysostom Brown is all right—husband public man; Helen Kenneth go. She have buy her ticket to Oxford. Sleep at hotel—luggage—play, and get great applause. The Grand Duke compliment her. Again the twenty-second. She write and ask her fees—ten guineas each evening and expense. No answer; write again; write three times; never any reply—never any money; and Mrs. Chrysostom Brown is a rich woman. Of course Helen Kenneth might go to law, but she would make such enmity—cost too much."

"It would," asserted Miss Zerlackner; "just fancy three years ago when I began. I had a letter of introduction to Lady Silbersmid—she is tremendously rich. 'Come to my *soirée* on Friday,' she say to me. 'I shall not

offer you anything, but my friends may engage you.' Well, I had to buy a dress—gloves—two cabs—and sang four songs, all for nothing for one of the richest women in London, and got no engagement. What can you do? Dere was Royalties dere, and all think you are paid. Now it is nice, to be sure: and my name in de paper."

"Now den!" cried Gunlius. "Miss Zerlackner?" Away she went, ascended to the platform, and in a few minutes was singing a brilliant gipsy song with every appearance of enjoying her work.

"Tell me, mademoiselle," began Hester, after listening for a minute or two to the Hungarian lady's song, "do you think I could make more money by teaching?"

"*Chut!* Listen to her—silence—and applaud: always *politesse* to singer," corrected Miss Rostroffsky.

"Pardon," said Hester, who had received a lesson in professional etiquette, and acknowledged the fact.

"Brava, brava! charming song," cried Miss Rostroffsky, clapping her hands with effusion. Hester followed suit, but with a sinking heart.

Miss Zerlackner nodded to them with a smile which showed a double row of brilliant, very hungry-looking teeth. It was, however, a real smile, quite unlike the *grimace de circonstance* with which she greeted her public, for she was pleased by Rostroffsky's applause. A sharp discrimination is in the singing world between the applause of the *cognoscenti* and the mere frequenters of the concert-halls.

"She have fine voice," observed Miss Rostroffsky



to Hester, "but phrase, she cannot; and ver' bad school, oh ver'—and do you observe how bad she stand? Do you know how to stand in pewblic?—if not, come to me and I will show you: always to stand on one foot, an' den trow back your shoulder—chess, miss. I have pay money to know dat, I can tell you."

Hester expressed a fitting sense of her obligations, and then repeated her question as to the emoluments of teaching.

"It all depends: if you mek a name by singing in public, you can get a guinea an hour; if not, you can get half-crown."

Hester made no answer to this, but her sigh and downcast air attracted the attention of the Russian, who if discouraging was certainly good-hearted.

"Poor dear thing," she said, patting her on the shoulder; "it is hard life to us—superbe, but painful *carrière*. I at once lof and detest it."

"And one is bound to it. It is not a thing that can be left aside."

"I did hope that once, to leaf it off, and have a family life," sighed Miss Rostroffsky, "but *hélas!*" This *hélas* came from the lowest depths of her lungs and diaphragm, and sounded so thoroughly genuine, that Hester hazarded a sympathetic interjection.

"Chess!" said Miss Rostroffsky; "a woman who has money, or who can earn money, it is easy for dem to marry; hundreds, thousands of men are only looking for wives who will keep them. Many men support

wives and children; and many women support husbands and children. But I will never. My intended, he was a charming, handsome man: I tink he was disinterested, dat he lof me; but one day I was saying, 'How happy shall I be when I have put away all de music, and sing no more!' 'Eh!' he cried; 'but I count on you to sing as much as before when we are married.' 'Adieu, Monsieur, immediatly.' You too," continued Miss Rostroffsky, after a pause for breath, necessary after the vigorous pantomime which accompanied her recital; "you will be pursued by men, for you are quite—not pretty, but *distinguée* and elegant lady, you know. Chess! and no doubt many men will offer you the honour of earning money for dem."

"I hope not," replied Hester, beginning to laugh at the serious face and tone of her friend; "and I hope your next experience, Mademoiselle, may be more fortunate."

"Perhaps," assented Mademoiselle, gravely; "who knows? I am so much admired, I may marry me yet."

TO MEET THE NEW CONTRALTO,

*Miss Dalrymp'e,*

LADY ROSSTON ·

AT HOME.

1250 Curzon Street,

May Fair.

5 O'CLOCK, R.S.V.P.

Hester found a brilliant crowd assembled in Lady Rosston's great drawing-rooms in Curzon Street, on the day appointed for her *début*. She was greeted very cordially by Lady Rosston. Grizel and Helen displayed the most gushing affection, and actually stood beside her at the piano; her accompaniment was condescendingly played by a young gentleman, in whose features, when he was presented to her as Mr. Isaacson, Hester had little difficulty in recognizing Miss Zerlackner's "young Chew," whose superior racial capacity had overreached that of the Hungarian musician.

Hester received his compliments with an amused smile. Then Lady Rosston swept her off, and she was presented to a Duchess, who after some flattering remarks inquired her address. Lady Rosston beamed with satisfaction; Grizel passed her arm through that of the successful *débutante*, and stood the centre of an admiring crowd with her.

"Superb!" murmured everybody, carefully re-echoing the adjectives of the Duchess; "so true," "pronounced her words so well."

Miss Boldene, who of course was present, was busy collecting to herself as many rays of reflected glory as possible, and was circulating deftly in the crowd, mentioning to the leading notables present that she had invented and was primarily responsible for this charming suppliant for their good graces.

Mr. Isaacson found an opportunity later of insinuating

himself close to Hester, and murmuring to her: "Could you let me have your address? I am going to have a concert shortly; the 27th," he added pointedly, in order to fix the date, and hurry to secure some of the big people present while "the thing was hot."

"Certainly," replied Hester, looking him straight in the face. "I have no engagement for that evening. *I will send you my agent's address,*" she added pointedly.

Mr. Isaacson bowed with a grin. He had not the slightest intention of paying a farthing for his music. He, who worshipped the aristocracy with his whole soul, thought it was reward enough for "these kind of people" to fiddle or sing to the august ears of the one countess and couple of lesser titled dames who patronized him. The duchess constantly refused to let him be introduced to her. Hester, who was employed now bowing right and left, became suddenly aware of a hand on her arm.

"Miss Boldene!" she exclaimed.

"My dear, I cannot get a word with you; and here is Mr. Cecil also dying to speak to you."

Hester turned round amazed; Miss Boldene was to be expected, but Mr. Cecil's face was a surprise. A friendly face among this crowd of strangers and critics was no unwelcome apparition. Miss Boldene had brought Mr. Cecil.

"I am very glad to see you," she said frankly.

"The gladness is all on my side," replied Mr. Cecil. "Our mutual—er—acquaintance, Miss Boldene, was

kind enough to get me a card for this, and so afforded me an opportunity of hearing you sing."

"Ah, and have you been pleased?" hazarded Hester.

"I am so astonished that I can hardly say it." But a vigorous thump on the piano drowned his words, and compelled silence. A raucous voice announced aloud:

"Barbara Frietchie, by the American poet Whittier," and then began a recitation with a piano *obbligato*, descriptive and expressive and ludicrous to every one whose sense of the ridiculous was not benumbed by the fact of a duchess being seated in the post of honour facing the performer.

There were two professional musicians present, and these testified their contempt of the undertaking by retiring into the lobby, where the presence of the people in livery did not restrain their open ridicule.

"It insults the poet," said one.

"'De offitzier plushed,'—rum ti dum dum," mimicked the other, drumming on the balustrade. "Is he baid?—or is he too infided to meed some beeble who vill pe of use to him?"

"No matter," replied number one; "that does not count for much."

"No; he is not using a foice, his capital; he is not making a bresent of his education, his means of liffing, that any day may tek from him, to rich peeble. Dere goes in de creat doctor, Sir Guy Gillpill—amateur of music too, and he pays: do dey mek him gif attendance



*free*—brescriptions? Dere, listen! It is Mees Dalrymple, the new contralto—nobel song.”

Mendelssohn's great song, 'Be thou faithful unto death,' was filling the air of the place, rising and swelling in an irresistible majesty of sound that seemed to penetrate the souls of the audience, enveloped and obscured as they were under clouds of pearl-powder, rouge, and divers perfumes. Mr. Cecil drew himself away into a corner, half-closed his eyes, and surrendered himself absolutely to the charms of the song which Hester was singing with the fervour and devotion of religious invocation. She saw no one, not even the Duchess. From where she stood she could turn her eyes towards the window. It was pleasant to look away out into the open from that crowd of strange faces, which she shrank from instinctively. Miss Boldene listened attentively, and really felt the singer's power. She declared afterwards that nothing had done her so much good save a sermon by some famous and high-placed dignitary of the Church.

Hester had a genuine triumph. The Duchess chanced to remember that the last time she had heard this particular song was at a centennial concert at the Albert Hall. Her young married daughter, who had died shortly afterwards, was beside her, and had been pleased with its rendering by Madame Sterling. When Miss Dalrymple had finished she rose and shook hands with her, saying in a low voice, "I thank you. You will hear from me directly." Then she left almost at once.

Lord Rosston had barely time to overtake her on the stairs, and he told his wife afterwards that she seemed to be quite overcome.

It was not Hester's song that caused the Duchess' emotion, although she got the credit of it. She got four engagements at twenty guineas each from people present, one being the famous *dilettante* Sir Guy Gillpill. The Duchess engaged her for a *soirée musicale* to sing for the Prince and Princess, and promised to use her influence to get her name put down for a State Concert at Windsor. Lord Rosston, after rack-ing his brains for a means to help Miss Dalrymple, suddenly informed Grizel that she must take a lesson every day for some considerable time. The afternoon was a great success; everybody went away filled with the novelty, and sounding her praises aloud.

Hester paid Miss Rostroffsky a visit next morning, to inform her of her success, and ask her advice on sundry matters. She found the soprano extended on the sofa, which was both too short and too narrow, evidently in bad spirits. A fire burned in the grate, and an inhaler which she had evidently been using stood on the table. The warmth was overpowering, and the sickly odour of some drug used as an inhalation added itself to that of the tuberose and gardenias of the bouquets which, as usual, encumbered the room.

"Ah! I am eel," was Miss Rostroffsky's reply to Hester's greeting; "a congestion of de troat. Nothing really, but it is so *triste*; de least ting wit my foice

cause me such anxiety. Ah, *mon dieu*, wat a life it is not to live at all !”

She was on the point of crying. Hester spoke encouragingly.

“Oh, come, mademoiselle, you are nervous. Go out and take a smart walk in the park. It is lovely to-day; the chestnuts are coming out.”

“Ah, chess; it is spring. I love the spring if I am at home wit my family; it is so beautiful at our home. Always, wen de trees do begin to get their buttons, I do begin to get the *heimweh*. Aaaach !”

“I want to tell you of yesterday,” began Hester, waiting, however, for the sigh to exhale itself; and she related her experiences.

“It is ver good,” commented Miss Rostroffsky; “excellent indeed, my dear, and you had better see Courlis at once and tell him, because Courlis, if he hear the Duchess have invite you, may offer you engagement. He heard you sing, chess, and did not offer to do anything for you. A voice alone is not enough; the press, and protections in the high society, that is the thing. Now at Moscow I shall have protections, so can do without dese newspapers, and dese wild Irishmen who amuse dereselves misleading de English public. You will see, now, Courlis will gif you an engagement. Barolo was at dat barty at Lady Rosston’s; did you not see him?—and he have relate to Courlis and to me all your success. Ver respectable person, dat Barolo. I felicit you.”

So encouraged, Hester asked Miss Rostroffsky to recommend her a trustworthy and not too costly dress-maker.

"Certainly, mit pleasure. Carambole, not far from here. She has chic, and not too dear. You can trust her. Economy is difficult, and sometimes too it cost dear; but I manage superbly. Look here—is this economy?"

She went to a drawer and pulled out a pair of large candles.

"When I was singing de other day in Liverpool, de hotel charge dese candles in de bill, so I tek dem wit me. Dey can say nothing, for I pay. Every time dey charge candles in the addition I tek dem. Not often I have to buy dem, and sometimes soap too, when I think the room is too dear."

Hester made no reply to this; she had enough to do to keep from laughing at the Russian lady's complacent countenance as she sat eyeing her greasy prizes. What with the wax candles which she had taken and the bouquets which she had been given, she looked like some eccentric saint that had got loose out of its shrine.

"Gif I was you I would go immediately to Courlis, because I have just hear that Miss Beltram has fallen ill, and you may get her part. She is advertised for contralto parts in his oratorios in Birmingham."

"You are really very kind, Miss Rostroffsky."

"Bah! do not let me hear you to say dat, if I could able do somefing for you. Ver kind!" she repeated.

"A lady, she come here yesterday, want me sing for her orphan school on the tenth. I say chess, and she say at once, 'You are reely ver kind.' Now, I expect to tek a cold in my troat by the tenth. I love not to gif away my singing. Den she vill *not* zay, 'Miss Rostroffsky is reely ver kind,'—no."

"Oh, but the orphans! you will do it for them."

"My dear littel thing, have common sense. Dis lady, who love to help the orphans out of oder people's pockets, give dis concert in her house. She is rich, she want to get in society, she have BrinCESS Gwendolen of Hamburg to patronize. Let her pay her artists, and not do charity on top of our poor backs. 'You will meet BrinCESS Gwendolen,' she say to me; 'I vill bresent you.'" And here, regretfully be it recorded, Miss Rostroffsky put her thumb to her short Finland nose. "BrinCESS, bah! dat will not pay my cab. Suppose I tell that to de cabman, and not pay him!"

"I had better go to Courlis," said Hester, getting up.

"Chess, my dear, and mek him my compliments; and listen! do not be persuaded to sing in dis oratorio for noting; mek him pay, and *in advance*."

"I promise you that," replied Hester, and away she went.

On entering Courlis' drawing-room, she found that worthy engaged in close conversation with a black-haired, much-bejewelled individual. Tobacco-smoke was in the air, and long-necked bottles of German wine were on the table.



On hearing Miss Dalrymple announced, both jumped up. Courlis advanced to meet her with a most deferential air.

"Just the very name we were wishing for, Judasohn, I mean Percy Douglas. Permit me to present you to our greatest contralto, a young lady who I pledge to you will be the talk of the world in this season, if properly introduced and advertised. At this very moment we speak of you, Miss Dalrymple, for our oratorio at Birmingham, then Manchester, then Glasgow, then Edinburgh. But I anticipate. Will you allow Mr. Ju—Percy Douglas to hear you sing?"

"Certainly," said Hester, thinking to herself that Mr. Percy Douglas was surely more obtrusively ugly than any one human being had a right to be.

She went to the piano without delay. Courlis accompanied, and she sang the same piece from 'St. Paul' that had made her such a success the previous day at Lady Rosston's.

Mr. Percy Douglas and Mr. Courlis exchanged glances repeatedly during the performance.

"Now, Mam'zelle! Superb, altogether superb! Now what do you say to sing the contralto parts for us as follows? Birmingham, twentieth; Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, to follow. You know what your work is."

"I know my work, yes. What terms?"

"You see, Mam'zelle," began Courlis after a smile and lifting of his eyebrows, as though the question were a surprise, "you are a *débutante*. A *débutante* is always a

risk for the *entrepreneurs*. Then, really there are ever so many contraltos who would give any money—any money, Judasohn,”—he turned to that person questioningly,—“Percy Douglas, I should say—to sing for us.”

“Dere ish gontraltos would bay one hundred pound for dis chanch,” responded the gentleman with the double name.

“What do you mean?” asked Hester, looking straight at Courlis, and ignoring the interpolation.

“I mean, Miss, dat we offer you to sing for us, to advertise you enormously,” and he was studying Hester’s face as he spoke, and probably saw something discouraging therein, “all over de country; to give you such a chanch as some singers pay enormously to haf.” He paused and waited.

Hester was silent, but began to tie her bonnet-strings.

“We—er—we will pay part your expenses.”

“You say—do I understand you?—that I am to sing at four different places, and that you will pay my expenses?”

“*And* advertise you en-ormously!” added Courlis. “And tink, Miss, of all de engagements to follow.”

“Mees,” exclaimed the double-named gentleman, rising from his seat in a state of great excitement, “gonsider! we will mek your name to ring from end to end of England, ve vill mek you *vamous*. Chust say de wort and glose de bargain.” He held out a huge soft claw, with huge rings and very dirty—the hand

of an *exploiteur* who never did a stroke of work in his life—as if to grasp Miss Dalrymple's.

She shrank back.

"We are wasting our time, Monsieur Courlis; I have an engagement this afternoon. I have decided on my terms, so we may as well end this discussion."

"Ant your derms?" questioned Douglas, with a lurid light in his deep black eyes.

"One hundred pounds *paid in advance*, and my expenses."

"Pooh!" cried the Douglas, with a screeching laugh, and marched over to the pier-glass, where he began to adjust his ringlets and admire his profile, with the addition thereto of a cigarette which he stuck in his mouth as if for ornament.

"Adieu!" said Hester to Courlis, who was drumming on the table and frowning. "You know my address and you have my terms."

She left at once and turned homewards direct. Close to Mrs. Greville's house she met Mr. Cecil.

"Mrs. Greville has been telling me that you have had a perfect shower of good fortune this morning," he said.

"Yes," said Hester, "I ought to be in high spirits, I suppose. But this may not last. They all tell me that I must get into the newspapers to make a lasting success, and I fear that is as far off as ever, and that I have made a *faux pas* this afternoon." Why she added this confidence she did not know.

"What did you do? could I help you?" he inquired heartily.

She rapidly sketched her interview with Courlis and his friend, and related her determination.

"I think you have done well," he announced, after a short meditation, "and your friend Miss Rostroffsky has no doubt excellent reasons for her advice. Just wait and see. You will hear from Courlis in a day or two; he will probably offer you something less. Stick to your own terms, I recommend you."

"You are very kind, and your advice jumps so exactly with my own inclination, that you need not doubt my following it. I am and shall be as avaricious as a Shylock until—"

"Until you have ransomed your obligation to Razzio; and quite right. Have you got any tuitions yet?"

"No; I do not like to ask for any until I pass this Rubicon—the singing in public, I mean, and the press notices. I can ask terms of a different kind if I succeed."

"Oh, you will succeed; you need not be afraid. But, Miss Dalrymple, I shall be anxious to hear if Courlis writes to you. Send me word by Mr. Greville to-morrow."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## CROWNED WITH SUCCESS.

THE morning brought a short note from Courlis to say that Mr. Percy Douglas had accepted her terms, that the first rehearsal would take place on such a date, enclosing her the dates of the concerts, the editions of the scores which were to be used, and some other items of information, as well as a cheque for a hundred pounds.

Hester bought a book, by Mrs. Greville's advice, and entered methodically her engagements of all kinds. Her visit to these good friends had now lasted nearly ten days. Mrs. Greville had promised to assist her in finding a suitable lodging, but she postponed the task, and finally begged Hester to stay with her until the series of oratorios should be over, and then she could look about for a suitable quarter at leisure.

"You know," she urged on Hester, "if you succeed, and go in for public singing exclusively, you can live where you like. If you have to teach you will have to live near your pupils probably, at the other side of the Park; so, my dear girl, wait until you see how things go at Manchester. You begin there—or is it at Birmingham?"

"Birmingham. I will telegraph to you how many



encores, how many bouquets, and cut out all the newspaper notices," laughed Hester.

"Perhaps, like Miss Rostroffsky, you will carry off the hotel candles; you say she is a Russian. Did a stronger passion than that of economy impel her?"

"I don't think she eat them—no, no. I must go and look up Mr. Nixeswald, and arrange about repetitions."

This she did without delay, and that experienced personage arranged with a leading piano warehouse for a *cabinet d'études*, for Hester had scruples as to inflicting her vocal exercises on Mrs. Greville's household. She set to work once more as she had been accustomed to with Razzio. She adopted the diet of Mademoiselle Rostroffsky, and eat "things for the voice," walked for two hours a day; and finally, with a dress-basket, in which was a couple or so of Madame Carambole's happiest thoughts in the way of dresses, started by the Birmingham mail. Barolo and several others, blanketed like so many horses, were of the company. Mrs. Greville came to see her off. Hester was sure that she caught sight of Mr. Cecil on the platform.

"I wish I were going with you," said Mrs. Greville; "it looks lonely for you to be setting out by yourself; and on such an important journey."

"You forget," said Hester, "that I am accustomed to being alone."

"It is no pleasanter for that."

"Quite true," assented Hester; "but I have so much to think of I shall have no time to feel lonely."

She had a night's rest before the time of trial came, and slept well. Next day, following Miss Rostroffsky's advice, she had a quiet dinner at four o'clock, drank half a tumbler of stout at dinner, and desired the waiter to bring her a small bottle to take with her to the Town Hall. This also was Miss Rostroffsky's prescription.

Her dress was exceedingly rich and good. The great trade centres are very much more exacting in this respect than the Metropolis. Madame Carambole, who was experienced, had added her warnings to those of Miss Rostroffsky; and Hester had ordered her dresses at exactly double the price which she had intended. She could use them for London engagements afterwards, she reflected. Carambole allowed her a good discount for the ready money payments, which was a consideration also.

She felt comfortable and at ease as to her attire, which, when she entered the artists' receiving-room, caused every one therein assembled to look at her. The only person whom she knew was Barolo. A fair-haired, stout woman, with superb diamonds, was standing near the fire-place. She scanned the new-comer very closely.

Hester had laid her bag on the table, which was pretty well covered with similar articles, and proceeded to unroll her music. Signor Barolo was whispering with the leading soprano.

"Permit me," he said presently to Hester, "to introduce you to Madame Malebranchi."

"I am delighted to have the honour of making your acquaintance," said Madame Malebranchi, who was a native of London. "You are taking the place of poor Miss Beltram, and a *début*, I understand."

"Yes, it is my *début*," said Hester.

"You are very calm and self-possessed. I wish I had your nerves." She was, in fact, shaking from head to foot, and Barolo, who had powdered his face, looked a kind of livid grey. They could hear a sort of confused heavy sound now, which entered with great distinctness. The audience was arriving; then the orchestra began to tune up, when the door opened to admit the tenor, a stout man, also *blonde*. He shook hands with every one, and expressed his good wishes to the *débutante*.

"The doors open—huge crowd; and Trampf has arrived."

"How do you do, Trampf?"

That personage appeared at that instant holding an ebony and silver *bâton* in one hand; in the other a pile of music.

"Hef you all music, gentlemen and ladies? You are all here. My dear Rightone, so glad to—eh? Where is Courlis?—dat fellow! Attention, ladies! Courlis conduct you, Madame. Barolo, you tek second soprano. Miss—ah—contralto, Mr. Rightone. You hef books?"

He, too, was anxious, and nervously fidgety. Drops of perspiration beaded his forehead; his hair, which, needless to say, was worn *à la Liszt*, was plastered down

into long, limp locks with pomade and flour, and the long-pointed white moustache had undergone a liberal treatment of the same kind. "Time!"

He darted through the door, and in a minute the sharp tap of the *bâton* was heard, then a great burst of melody, and the overture had begun.

"Are you always so nervous?" asked Hester of Madame Malebranchi. She felt herself being infected by the atmosphere of terror which seemed to fill the place. The *basso*, a great tall man, was overwhelmed with despondency, and the tenor, who was to open, was sipping stout with grimaces.

"I was a little hoarse this morning. *Do—re—mi—sol—fa—fa*—it is gone."

"*Fa—sol—mi—re—do*"—sang the *basso*. His voice was celebrated; the vibration impressed Hester like a great organ note. She had heard him sing in Paris.

At this moment in bounced Courlis, in full dress; a rose in his button-hole, curled, scented, gloved, and smiling. He had been admiring the audience, which was a crowded one—and hence his good-humour. He had brought a great bouquet for Miss Dalrymple, thinking that this token of his admiration and goodwill could not fail to stimulate her to do her best.

"It go superbly wit hair dress? Eh, Madame Malebranchi?" He had run his eyes critically over Hester's attire, and was thoroughly pleased with it.

Madame Malebranchi, who had been a *débutante* once,

replied with a smile only. She knew Courlis and his endless tricks.

"Now, Mr. Rightone!" The door swung open, and the tenor, looking very pale, disappeared, followed by a great sigh of anxiety from the others. He had two minutes to wait at the foot of the steps leading up to the platform. Presently they could all hear his voice. Barolo turned greyer. The *basso* sunk his head on his chest, and the tears began to overflow Madame Malebranchi's eyes, but out of consideration for her rouge and powder, she kept wiping them up with her handkerchief.

Hester's heart sunk within her.

"How *can* you sing if you are so nervous, Madame?" she asked.

"It will pass off immediately that I set foot on the platform."

"Wit me the same," said Barolo.

"Wit huz all!" added the *basso*.

"Don't you take porter?" asked the soprano.

"I had almost forgotten it," said Hester, and opening her bag she poured out a travelling-cup full and drank it.

"You are cool, I see," observed the other, "but it is that you are new. Better," she added, "be frightened now than when you are on the platform."

Then the half-smothered sound of Rightone's voice ceased. A great storm of applause followed; the door swung open, admitting the singer, flushed and panting. The applause followed him in, although he had returned and bowed his acknowledgments.



"Charming, Mr. Rightone; I congratulate you," said the soprano, buttoning a refractory button of her long gloves.

"Vell done; ver' vell done," said Barolo.

The *basso* also growled something amiable.

"Now then—*duo! duo!*" cried Courlis at the door.

Out they all trooped, save the *basso* and Hester. Her turn came next; and now for the first time she felt that terrible fear of the public which every real artist knows. She could hear the music and the voices distinctly, but she was picturing to herself the great sea of strange faces, the thousands of critical ears, whose owners had paid for their places, and could by no means be depended on to applaud anything they did not approve.

She opened her song, and tried to sing the first line, but her voice trembled and sounded so strange that she did not recognize it. "It is all over with me," she said to herself. "I feel more ready to faint than to sing."

"Hey!" said a great rough voice; "Mees, you are doo pale. Ho, ho! pfui! tek quick some-stout." The *basso*, who was kind-hearted, filled out porter, and forced Hester to drink fully half her provision of that liquid. "Gourage!—haf strength. Dese good beople are all vriendly. Listen to dat! Hey! you an artist—Mees!"

In a few minutes it was over. A burst of clapping and shouting reached their ears. Barolo, the paleness all gone, flushed and triumphant, bounced in and held the baize door open for Madame Malebranchi. She, too, seemed in high spirits.

"Bravo! brava!" cried Courlis, dashing in. "It has gone splendidly. Dank you, ladies and chentlemen, danks; charming sung—heh, is dat a recall?" He cocked his ear towards the door.

"Come on! come on!" entreated a man in livery, opening the baize door again and beckoning with his other hand.

Out they all swept to climb up on the platform again, and bow and curtsy. When Madame Malebranchi reappeared this time she had a bouquet.

"Now," said Courlis, "Miss Dalrymple, it is you. Come then." Hester rose; her heart almost ceased to beat.

"Take up your beautiful skirt, the passage is dirty," suggested Madame Malebranchi. "Mr. Courlis, it is a disgrace; look at my frills!" They were indeed soiled. "Courage, Miss Dalrymple, you will take all their hearts by storm. Don't be afraid, my dear, we all have to make a beginning." She patted Hester's back amiably. "Nothing like a Birmingham audience—so kind, so appreciative. You are fortunate to begin here. It is quite another thing at the Crystal Palace."

"Yah! the London beople has to bay for its music dere, so dey is ver' critick in revench," grumbled the *basso*.

Hester took Courlis' arm; he carried her music and bouquet, and she had a hand free to hold her skirt.

The man in livery, an old hand, who remembered Grisi and Jenny Lind and their great compeers, looked

at her with sympathetic interest. The orchestra had eight bars to play yet.

"Splendid audience, Miss! Don't you be nervis; they'll do you justice. Lor' bless you, Madame there"—jerking his thumb towards the baize door—"she was wipin' her eyes to the very last second, she wos; keep up yer 'art, Miss, there's nothin' like it."

"It's the frightened ones as allus comes off the best—it is!" He added this as he flung back the wicket at the foot of the stairs, and gave them egress to the platform-steps.

What a sea of heads, thousands and thousands; and all their eyes, opera-glasses, levelled on her! Every one turned back to the first page of his or her book to verify the name of the person who was to sing instead of Miss Beltram, and the rustle was like a mighty wind sweeping through an autumn wood. The orchestra were playing her preliminary four bars. Courlis had released her arm, and withdrawn to the foot of the stairs, where he peeped under the red curtain, which enclosed the passage for the singers, at the audience.

Hester fixed her eyes on her sheet of music; the notes all swam together like some phantasmagoria until the end of the third bar, then the beautiful rich harmonies asserted their rights over her, and woke her as it were from a nightmare. She ceased trembling; then with a deep breath that filled her lungs, threw back her head and shoulders, and uttered her first note.

"Dat's all right," said Courlis aloud, and he wiped

his forehead; for, to tell the truth, the last quarter of an hour had been a bad one for him. He opened the door, stretched in his arm, and rapped on the baize door.

It flew open at once; he beckoned, and out the artists all came, and stood in the passage, listening admiringly.

"Crrand, crand," whispered the *basso* vibrantly.

"She's the first contralto in Europe," whispered Courlis, adding in his delight an oath, as a crescendo passage displayed the power and range of Miss Dalrymple's voice. "Four thousand a-year if properly managed; if properly managed, four thousand a-year!" repeated Courlis, and licked his lips, and gazed with an air of almost veneration at the *débutante*. Barolo made an attitude and twisted his moustache with an aggressive look at his employer. After a few minutes, each of which consolidated Hester's position, Courlis made them a sign to withdraw and leave the passage clear and unencumbered. She was nearing the end of her song, and he advanced one foot on the stairs. The conductor could see him, and threw him a glance of congratulation between two beats.

The last note had died away, and the audience were all on their feet, cheering and applauding vociferously; up dashed Courlis, and took her hand at once, bowing in response to the acclamations. He was well known in Birmingham, and presently had the delight of hearing his name among the tumultuous bravos.

Three times Hester had to ascend the platform and

curtsey. More bouquets were handed up than she could carry. Courlis' hands were full as well as hers, and there was a general outburst when she presented herself in the artists' room. The soprano kissed her; the others overflowed in laudatory speeches.

She needed none of their encouragement now. The die was cast and the Rubicon crossed; she was a great singer, and her future was assured. Every time for the remainder of the evening that she reappeared on the platform, the audience reminded her that she was famous. She thought of Paris, of her troubles and afflictions there. All that was over for ever; the doors were opened to her now.

The oratorio was over; they were all leaving. Madame Malebranchi had friends who sent their carriage round to the platform door for her; Hester had a brougham from the hotel, and was finishing collecting her bouquets and impedimenta, when Courlis appeared.

"Allow me, Miss Dalrymple; give me all those."

Courlis' manner had become somewhat offensive and unpleasant to Hester as the evening went on, and now seemed to culminate in a sort of familiarity which she felt that she must put an end to. He ran across the pavement and put all the bouquets on the front seat, then came back for her.

"I will see you home," he said, taking her hand and drawing it through his arm, retaining his hold of her hand.



"No, Mr. Courlis, thank you. I prefer to return as I came, alone."

"Stuff!" said Courlis; "I will come," and he actually squeezed her hand.

Hester almost trembled, she felt thoroughly frightened. She felt certain that nothing short of physical force would prevent her persecutor from getting into the fly. She was uncertain what to say or do, when relief appeared suddenly and unexpectedly. A tall figure seemed to rise out of the darkness, and a voice which she recognized at the first word said quietly and calmly—

"Good evening, Miss Dalrymple. Good evening, Monsieur Courlis."

Courlis started violently. "Mr. Cecil! Hallo!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Cecil, "I came down from London on purpose to hear Miss Dalrymple's *début*. I congratulate you. But we had better not keep her standing here. I shall call to see you to-morrow early. Good night. Drive on—Midland Hotel."

Before Hester could recover from her surprise the brougham was driving off. She looked back and saw Courlis and Mr. Cecil strolling along apparently amicably together.

At eleven o'clock next day Mr. Cecil was ushered into the coffee-room of the hotel. Hester did not keep him long waiting.

"You were astonished to see me last night?" he said.

"I hardly know whether I was more astonished or pleased," said Hester; "but really my head has been

turning round ever since. I promised to telegraph to dear Mrs. Greville, but found myself incapable of putting twenty consecutive words together."

"Have you seen the papers to-day?"

"Yes; the people here kindly sent me several to my room. Ah, Mr. Cecil, you cannot imagine the weight that is lifted from me! After all, I am strong, I may live to the end of the year, and Razzio be paid." She walked to the end of the room and back, her cheeks burning with excitement. "I am going to write to him to-day, and to send him these press notices."

"You won't forget Mrs. Greville?" he asked. "No; well, let me do that much for you, and I can describe the effect you made into the bargain."

"Were *you* at the oratorio? did you hear it?" she questioned.

Mr. Cecil looked at her for a moment before replying:

"Yes, I was there; I came down from London by the same train, and on purpose to be present; but I kept out of sight, and took a seat behind a pillar, or some projection."

"Why did you do that?" she asked. "I should have been glad to have found one face that I knew. I felt so lonely, and I should have been sure to have found you out."

There was silence for a moment or two between them now.

"Well," he said, "look out for me at Manchester then, and at Liverpool, and Glasgow."

Hester's eyes were wide-opened with wonder.

"I do not like you to be alone," he went on, speaking very quickly. "I cannot endure the thought of your travelling in this way, unprotected, and amongst such—"

"I cannot accept *your* escort, all the same, Mr. Cecil," returned Hester. "It may be very uncomfortable for me, but I hope shortly to be able to afford myself a companion or a maid of suitable age, and that sort of thing. Don't think me unkind," she said hastily; "but you see it is out of the question."

"*Give me a right* to go," he said, coming nearer to her, and looking close into her face. "Give me a right to stand between you and the world. Let me pay your forfeit to Courlis, and come back to London to Mrs. Greville's with me as my affianced wife."

"No, no, no; not one word more, Mr. Cecil."

She sat down and covered her face with her hands. He waited patiently for a few minutes.

"I have not offended you, I hope?"

"Oh no."

"Will you not answer me differently?"

"Mr. Cecil, I never dreamt for a moment that you could have such a thought concerning me. I am altogether shocked and surprised by this; I never expected such—"

"Well," he returned, "take time and think of it. And since you will not allow me to go to hear you sing in Manchester, I must only resign myself and go home; but I cannot endure the idea of you being alone."

"You forget how thoroughly accustomed I am to it."

"No, no, you are not; you ought not to be. But I *must* go back, I suppose." He stood still for a moment pondering. "I think you are right after all," he said.

"I know I am," she replied.

"Give me a crumb of hope, at least."

Hester looked at him straight in the eyes.

"Promise me first that you will never again say a word on the subject to me until I am a free agent, and have discharged all my obligations."

His face grew very clouded.

"Miss Dalrymple, first let me speak. I am very well off, as curates go; I have something more than a thousand a year of my own. Will you not allow me to free you from—"

"No, never! not a centime shall any one pay for me but myself. You must not say another word."

He knew this; to look at her as she said it was confirmation of her words.

He said very slowly and unwillingly, "I promise you then, faithfully."

Hester looked at him silently.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good-bye," she answered; "I—I am very grateful to you."

"I can't say you've shown it," he made answer, rather grimly; "but you are to tell me that when you come back to town."

"Oh, no," she made haste to correct him, "you are mistaking me; not for a much longer time."

He only looked at her, and went his way. Whether Mr. Cecil had an interview with the enterprising Courlis or not before he took the up-mail to town was never known, but Hester was not again subjected to that gentleman's attentions during the tour, which was indeed a kind of triumphal progress for her.

She found a friendly letter of congratulation from Razzio waiting for her at Mrs. Greville's on her return to town, telling her to take time and not overwork herself, and complimenting her highly on her success. Two months later she sent him a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds, and before the year was out Signor Razzio was paid in full, and Mr. Cecil released from his promise at the same time.

Hester sings still, but not for money now; still less "to meet people who may be of use to her." Her friends, who are many, and her charities, which are frequent, command her services at all times, and of her old life there is no souvenir that she prizes higher than the little folded paper that she found that memorable winter's day on the Place de la République.

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